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THE

WHITE HOUSE AT ST. RÉAL.

A STORY FOR SCHOOL-BOYS.

FROM THE FRENCH OF

MADAME E. DE PRESSENSÉ.

VI 332

AUTHORISED TRANSLATION.

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THE WHITE HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

THE WHITE HOUSE AND ITS INHABITANTS.

"How happy the people must be who live here!" was the common exclamation of the stranger, as he passed before this pleasant dwelling-place, so well concealed amongst the trees as to be only clearly perceptible at a turning of the road, between two branches of eglantine, which separated themselves to be quickly reunited, and which thus formed a sort of jagged archway above the bushy hedge. The passer-by stopped involuntarily, for a moment, to look at the pretty picture in its elegant framework of verdure. The house was simply built, and its walls were almost entirely hidden by clematis and climbing roses. Old linden and chestnut trees overshadowed it on every side. A narrow terrace, gay with flowers, which bloomed there in great profusion, was all that lay between the house and a large orchard. This orchard, of which the thick rank

grass resisted the crushing footstep, and arose again, in a few moments, to obliterate every trace, descended by a rapid slope towards a brook, bordered with willows and nut-trees, the pleasant murmur of which might be heard at some distance. It was not easy to believe that a streamlet so peaceful and limpid could possibly lay just claim to the title of "torrent," as it was proudly designated by the inhabitants of the White House, but they enjoyed describing how this devastating torrent descended tumultuously from the mountain, overturning everything that obstructed it in its course; and how, suddenly, on turning the foot of the hill, its waters meandered gently between the flowery banks, as if appeased and tranquillized by the grace and beauty that surrounded them. Sometimes, however, its little ripples, encountering a large stone or other obstruction, would recede for a moment, to return to the charge with increased force; then their white foam would scatter itself as far as the silvery leaves of the willow, the overhanging branches of which united themselves with those of their companions on the opposite bank. A little bridge spans the stream, and forms a communication between the orchard and the extensive meadow lands that clothe the adjacent hill. Sensible people appreciate this contrivance, and if at all subject to giddiness, find the difficulty to be encountered sufficiently great, for the narrow, flexible plank rebounds under even the lightest footfall. For those extravagant beings,

however, who are never satisfied with things in moderation, there is a perilous crossing close at hand, which they will find much more attractive.

To cross the little river from stone to stone, resting very lightly on their polished, slippery summits, which stand just above the surface of the water, was a pleasure without its equal in the opinion of the little inmates of the White House, if we except the sensible Clémence, a young lady of fourteen, who could never understand the pleasure of getting wet feet, when it could so easily be avoided. It was an inexhaustible subject of contention between her and her brother Robert.

Clémence was the eldest of four children. Robert and Eugène, scarcely separated by a year, followed her quickly. They did not resemble each other in the least. The first was fair and fresh-coloured, had wide shoulders, a flexible, vigorous frame, and his blue eyes announced a frank, lively disposition. He was the favourite of both servants and peasants; they thought his brother and sister proud, but declared there was nothing in the world they would not gladly do for Master Robert.

And yet Eugène was not proud; he was only timid. His brown hair and pale complexion formed a striking contrast with his brother's light locks and rosy cheeks. He was the taller, but much the more fragile of the two. He might be more often seen with a book under his arm than Robert, who loved better to handle the spade, the whip, or the

pickaxe. The brothers loved each other dearly, but their tastes were too dissimilar to allow of their being very intimately united.

Isabelle was by far the youngest of the family, having only completed her seventh year. She was Robert's inseparable companion. As soon as ever she could run alone, they were associated. Wherever Robert was to be found, it was pretty certain that a merry little face would not be long in making its appearance.

M. and Madame Hervé were entirely devoted to the education of their children. They had not hesitated to accept a life of comparative seclusion, in order that they might be enabled more fully to consecrate themselves to this paramount duty. But they were not insensible to the pleasures and varied interests which the country has to offer to the true lover of nature, even during those months in which she wears her least attractive garb. There was but little society at St. Réal; but their best friends well knew how to find their way, during the summer months, to the "frightful desert," as they persisted in calling it, to the most amusing annoyance of the children, who could not possibly imagine that a more lovely spot existed in the whole universe.

They had some good, simple-hearted, obliging neighbours, with whom they were naturally upon the best of terms, and if these honest country folk knew but little of what passed in the far-off world, and believed that the sun arose every morning with the

special, and indeed sole, design of shedding his vivifying rays upon St. Réal, they could nevertheless converse very sensibly and instructively upon topics more directly connected with their individual interests.

Robert and Isabelle were quite at home in most of these humble dwellings. As to Eugène, extreme timidity prevented his being equally familiar, and Clémence, in spite of her short stature, had a certain look of loftiness, which was not very satisfactory to the rustic inhabitants of St. Réal. She seemed not to believe that the village children were of the same species as herself, and they, without knowing why, were conscious of it, and never, by any chance, crossed, in her presence, the extremest verge of a cold respect.

There were not four happier children in the world. It is charming to pass one's life in the midst of flower-enamelled meadows and thick woods, in the enjoyment of a degree of liberty all unknown to the poor little prisoners of the city. Thrice happy they who have lived in the country from their earliest childhood! Joyous recollections of those favoured years will increase in vivid brightness even unto old age. The sun, the grass, flowers, fruits, animals of every kind, from the butterfly that invites the chase, to the cart-horse on which he returns from the field in slow triumph, what more does the child require to make him perfectly happy? Robert and Isabelle rejoiced in it all, as little birds

that have never known captivity in a cage, rejoice in their liberty.

Eugène was happy too in his own way. He was of a dreamy temperament and not fond of violent exercise. His chief pleasure consisted in lying amongst the long grass, and looking at the sky through the leafy branches above his head, whilst he listened to the soft murmur of the streamlet. He liked too to establish himself in a sort of hollow formed by the knotty branches of an old apple-tree, which intertwined themselves in a curious manner a few feet above the ground, and there he would read again and again, times without number, one of his favourite books. As to Clémence, fresh air and liberty were less necessary to her than to the others. She preferred well-trodden roads to wild and rugged pathways: liked better to seat herself on a garden-chair than in cozy nooks in the trunks of trees, and persisted in choosing to cross the bridge rather than the slippery stones in the bed of the torrent. Her dress was always irreproachably neat; and she was still very little, when her mamma began to call her her right-hand.

Robert, who was more especially the object of his sister's sage reprimands, rarely gave her any other name than that of Mrs. Reason or little Miss Perfect. She owed the latter appellation to a lady, a stranger, who had greatly admired her manners, and the clear categorical answers she had given to all her questions. The anecdote had passed into a proverb in

the family, and poor Clémence thus rallied by her brothers, often bitterly regretted the vanity which had led her to mention the circumstance.

Madame Hervé was quite an invalid, and seldom left the sofa, whence, however, she watched with never-tiring vigilance all that passed in the house. But if much outward exertion was denied her, the mild and well directed energy of her mind was but the more beautifully developed. Her children respected and loved her tenderly. Robert wearied her sometimes inadvertently by the natural impetuosity of his character, but Eugène, tender, attentive, eager for the approbation of those he loved, rarely gave her any trouble.

He was a much better scholar than his brother, who had no taste for study.

Hitherto Madame Hervé had been able to keep her four children near her; but now, alas! she saw the moment rapidly approaching when she should be called upon to submit to a separation from her two sons. Their father had never indulged the wish of educating them entirely at home; on the contrary, he desired that at the proper time they should mingle with boys of their own age, and join in the daily struggle against the difficulties and temptations inseparable from a public school. It was therefore decided, that, after the vacation, Eugène and Robert, bidding adieu to the White House, should become the pupils of M. Bertin of Paris. This gentleman, after being one of the Professors who instructed

their father, remained his friend, and had consented to receive the children of such of his former pupils as were still attached to him. He had at first commenced with five or six; but the number had gradually increased, and this year he expected to have fifteen or twenty boys, without intending that, on this account, the family unity and easy familiar intercourse existing in the household, should be changed for severer rule.

The month of September had just commenced. The air was pure and mild, and a gentle east wind gave promise of continued fine weather.

The children had studied these prognostics from an early hour, for to-morrow was to be a most important day. Robert and Eugène were to go out shooting with their father. For at least the twentieth time they had examined the vane, and declared that the wind was as favourable as could be desired, when M. Hervé appeared at the entrance of the court-yard.

"Oh, papa," exclaimed Robert, rushing towards him, "we shall go, shall we not? the weather will be lovely!"

"I think it will, my dear," said M. Hervé; "but an obstacle of another kind will prevent the execution of our project. I have received a letter from your aunt, and shall have to go to Lyons to-morrow on urgent business. I shall not be back again before the end of the week."

Robert's countenance clouded over.

"Could you not go the day after to-morrow, papa?"

"No, my dear, impossible. But where is your mamma? I must speak to her at once."

"It is past bearing!" cried Robert, stamping violently, as soon as his father had entered the house; "they should not tell us we should go out shooting, if they mean to break their promise. Well, I shall not do anything to-morrow, I can promise you!"

"Oh, Robert! you surely did not see how troubled papa looked; he must have had bad news!"

This fear in some measure calmed Robert's selfish anger; the two children approached the glass-door of the drawing-room, and saw that their mother wept whilst their father read a letter to her. They could not distinguish the words, but the sound of his voice gave sufficient evidence that he was sad and uneasy. When the letter was finished:—

"There is no time to lose," said M. Hervé, rising, "I must go this evening; I will get my carpet-bag ready. If we sup at seven o'clock instead of at eight, I shall manage to meet the coach at B——, and can then arrive to-morrow morning."

"Our poor sister!" said Madame Hervé, drying her eyes; "She is greatly to be felt for, and I am anxious you should be with her."

"It is her own fault," replied M. Hervé, with some vehemence. "He certainly was not a naughty boy; he needed affection, and only met with cold-

ness and indifference. If we find him—and God grant that it may be at once—I will bring him here. We will begin by loving him; the happiness of finding himself the object of real affection will do him good, and then we can see what there is further to be accomplished."

"Yes," said Madame Hervé, "He must come. Poor child, he will have been sufficiently punished for his fault by all he must have suffered."

The children were not told the reason of their father's sudden departure. They saw very plainly by his absent manner, and by their mother's red eyes, that something serious had occurred; but they were accustomed to control their curiosity and asked no questions. Before he set out, M. Hervé gathered them around him, and desired them to give no trouble to their mamma during his absence; to be scrupulously obedient, whether in or out of her presence; and on no account whatever to go beyond their own grounds. They promised, and took leave of their papa with more sorrow than so short an absence would have caused them, had the occasion of it been less enveloped in mystery.

CHAPTER II.

A STEP OUT OF THE NARROW WAY.

Towards evening the next day, Eugène left the house in a very discontented mood. His mother had reproved him for a fault, a slight one, indeed, yet not without its importance, and he thought she was unjust.

To bear anything in the shape of injustice, was utterly beyond Eugène's capacity,—or at least he thought so. So he wandered away upon the very limits of forbidden ground; and, whether by distraction or by revolt, it was not long before he passed these limits, and found himself upon the high-road.

There was, at some little distance, a sort of grove, in the midst of which was a deep pond, surrounded by lime-trees and poplars. It was here that the village children met to play. M. Hervé had sometimes given his sons permission to go there, and they had joined in more than one game of bowls with the young rustics. There was no one to be seen this evening. Eugène seated himself on the bank, and leaned against the trunk of a tree.

He looked at the grey motionless water, and persuaded himself that he was very unhappy, as children do sometimes, before they have learnt to distinguish between real and imaginary ill. He asked himself seriously whether he should return to the house, or whether he should penetrate still further into the wood, when the sound of approaching steps and whispering voices fell upon his ear. Two boys, of about fifteen or sixteen years of age, stopped short, just under the tree against which Eugène was leaning, and which concealed him from view.

"The foolish child is not there," said one of them, looking all around. "Is he trying to give himself airs, by making us wait his pleasure?"

"But, Etienne, are you sure it is wise to have anything to do with him?" asked the smaller of the boys; "he is so young, he will perhaps tell tales."

"Nonsense! be easy; he is too much afraid of his father for there to be any danger of his ever breathing a word of what he has done. It seems he is a terrible man, this father; the child says he would kill him if he were to discover the least thing. Besides, the boy is cunning as a serpent, and we want some one less than ourselves to climb easily, and without making a noise; he is thin enough to squeeze through any crevice. Shall I tell you how he can make himself useful?" added Etienne, speaking in a still lower key; "if by any chance the gardener gets scent of us we 'll let him be taken, and look out for ourselves."

"Yes, but if he betrays us?"

"He won't be such a fool. I'll teach him that lesson. They'll let him off with a slight punishment; but as for us, who have more than one affair upon our shoulders, we should find small mercy."

"Yes, but the father!"

"Ah! the father—The best way will be not to let ourselves be caught, that's certain. Here he comes, the simpleton! Do you think we have nothing to do but to wait for you, you little rascal? Come here, and let me pull your ears."

"I could not come sooner," said a clear sweet voice, which struck Eugène, because it was quite different from that of other children of the village.

It seemed to him that the child retreated a few paces, to escape the amiable reception that was offered him.

"Well, let us go! we have no time to lose? They unfasten the dog at the castle at ten o'clock, and besides the moon will have risen before that hour. We must hurry ourselves. Have you the bag, Gervais?"

"Yes, yes, I have everything necessary."

"Very well, we will go; march!"

"But what are we going to do," asked the little boy who had just arrived. "I will not steal, that I wont. I declare I will not steal!"

"Pooh, pooh! no need for such a display of virtue, young one! When one is not afraid to share the booty, one should not be afraid to share the danger—it is rather too good a joke that! We can't do

without you, and besides it's only a few pears and peaches—not worth making such a fuss about. Come quick, let us go! You have no choice, for if you don't come willingly we'll go and tell your father how scrupulous you've been hitherto."

At this moment Eugène who had not lost a single word of the conversation, and who had held his breath for fear he should be discovered by these naughty boys was obliged much against his will—to sneeze—and he did so with even more than ordinary violence, because he had for some time forcibly resisted the necessity. All three confederates stopped short.

Etienne walked round the tree, and seizing the poor sneezer by the arm, dragged him out of the darkness, that he might examine his features by the still faintly glimmering twilight.

"You would have done well not to have sneezed, and better still not to have hidden yourself behind that tree like a spy, young gentleman; you shall pay pretty dearly for this freak."

"What are you going to do?" asked Gervais, on seeing his companion capture Eugène.

"Give him a bath, which shall deprive him for the rest of his life of all wish to play the listener!"

"Oh no! let him alone, you'll only get us into trouble. Make him promise not to say anything. If you put him into the water, it will all be found out."

Etienne yielded to the force of this argument, and contented himself by violently shaking poor Eugène,

by more than once pulling his hair and his ears, and by threatening him with the most terrible punishment, if a single word of what he had seen and heard were ever known to pass his lips. Eugène, trembling, and disgusted beyond measure at the position in which he found himself, ran off as fast as his legs could carry him. He bitterly repented the disobedience which had led to such terrible results. He had noticed, dark as it was, a fair delicate face, which looked rather that of an angel than of a little thief—gazing on him with a singular mixture of pity and of defiance.

Eugène began to reflect on what had passed, as soon as a return to their own grounds, which he had done very wrong to quit, enabled him to diminish the speed of his retreat. There was no doubt that the château d'Ermance was to be pilfered by those little vagabonds, and that this very evening: they had spoken of the moon, and of the hour when the watch-dog would be let loose. Most likely it was the wall-fruit that attracted them. And lo! he was in the secret,—had promised not to betray them,—was himself guilty of an act of disobedience that he dared not confess! Oh, he had never before been in such trouble, or had such a load upon his conscience. What would he not have given to be able to retrace his steps, and blot that last evil hour from the history of his life! Why, at all events, had he not resisted, and refused to promise secrecy? He thought now it would have been easy to have done so; and

yet—he could not recur without trembling to the terror he had felt when so roughly seized by Etienne. He scarcely dared enter the house. What should he do? What could he say? How should he explain his agitation? He stopped a moment at the drawing-room door; it was a stranger's voice he heard: that assured him; he entered. His mother was talking with a gentleman, and scarcely noticed him. This gave him courage, and he suddenly resolved not to say a single word of the affair; for the confession of his disobedience might induce the betrayal of the secret he had promised to keep. His mother soon drew him towards her caressingly, and presented him to the stranger.

"You have studied late this evening, my love. Had you so much to do?"

"Yes, mamma," said Eugène.

It was the first time that he had ever told his mother a lie. He felt as if an enormous weight had fallen on his heart. No matter that he tried to persuade himself it was only to the latter part of her question that he had answered; that his father really had left him a great deal to do in his absence, and that he must get up very early next morning, to prepare the lessons that his mother believed to be already out of hand; he could neither satisfy his conscience nor escape from his misery.

Later in the evening, after the visitor had left them, a note was brought for Madame Hervé. When she had read it, she told the children that Madame

d'Ermance invited the whole family to pass an entire day at the castle, and said she should write a few lines to accept the invitation for one day in the following week, when their papa would be at home again.

At the name d'Ermance, Eugène trembled. He could not possibly rejoice as did his brother and sisters at the prospect of this unexpected pleasure; they had only very recently become acquainted with the family at the castle, and it would be their first visit.

In the course of a day or two Madame Hervé received a letter from her husband, which she opened with visible signs of emotion.

"Thank God! thank God!" she exclaimed on reading the first few lines.

"What is it, mamma?" asked the children.

"You must not ask me, my darlings, it is nothing I can explain to you."

They said no more, but their curiosity was greatly excited. When Madame Hervé had finished reading, she called her children around her, and told them that their papa hoped to return to-morrow, and to bring with him their cousin Jérôme, whom they had not seen for several years; he would probably spend several weeks with them. There were lively outbursts of joy at these unexpected tidings. Madame Hervé added that she felt happy to be able to tell their papa that not one of them had caused her the slightest uneasiness during his absence.

Eugène turned pale on hearing these words, and when his mother embraced them all with even more than her usual tenderness, he disengaged himself from her caress, ran up stairs, undressed hastily, and obstinately resisted all the efforts of his brother to induce him to converse. Yet he was not in the least sleepy; and Robert had been a long time steeped in forgetfulness, before Eugène had ceased to turn himself upon his uneasy pillow, like a patient in the weary restlessness of fever. It was the third time he had laid himself to sleep without prayer.

CHAPTER III.

JÉRÔME.

THE carriage was sent to meet M. Hervé at the coach office. Old Nicolas was coachman, gardener, valet, in a word, household factotum: the children loved him dearly, although, on account of his quick harsh manner, they often called him "porcupine," or "thorn-bush." It was only Isabelle who knew how to handle him without pricking her fingers; she, little witch, could do with him just whatever she chose. Nicolas was desired to take some cords with him, in case they should be needed to secure the luggage, as his master would not return alone.

"And who is he going to bring with him then?" asked the old man, in a tone of vexation, as if to bring home a stranger had been a personal affront offered him by his master.

"One of my nephews, Nicolas," said Madame Hervé quietly; she was too well assured of the old servant's attachment to be ever much troubled at his whims, "a little boy who is coming to spend a few days with us."

"As if there were not children enough already to

turn a house topsy-turvy!" grumbled Nicolas, rolling up the cord.

"Have patience, Nicolas," said Robert, "we shall very soon leave off upsetting things. When we are gone to school, the place will be quiet enough."

"It's not that that's likely to console me anyhow," said the old man. "One's got accustomed to you; and a house without children is as bad as a farmyard without chickens. Besides; those schools! I'm not over fond of 'em, not I. It's my opinion as children had ought to stay where God has placed 'em, and as nobody can teach 'em better nor their own proper parents. God made man what he ought to be, but there's a many people as tries to make him what he had'nt ought to be!"

After thus giving expression to sentiments inspired by the philosophy of discontent, Nicolas cracked his whip and started.

But it is high time we accounted for the sudden departure of M. Hervé, and the expected arrival of his nephew.

Madame Lambert, M. Hervé's sister, had married a merchant possessed of considerable property. He was a widower, and had two sons, William and Jérôme. She was a proud woman, and her husband had committed to her the education of his boys with the most entire trust. M. Lambert occupied himself exclusively with business, and thought he had done all that devolved upon him when he had secured to his family the advantage of assured

affluence. The ambition of Madame Lambert took a different development. She wished that her husband's sons should distinguish themselves as scholars. She even longed that they should enter upon a literary career, which, while it augmented, would add lustre to the fortune that their father had accumulated with so much effort. William, the elder son, seemed at first disposed to realize these bright dreams. A retentive memory, and extreme quickness of comprehension, compensated in great degree for the persevering attention which was lacking. He obtained a few prizes without much trouble, and thereby dazzled the eyes of his step-mother, who construed every present success into a sure promise of future triumphs. William was a handsome boy, and his appearance and easy, natural manners flattered her pride.

This was not the case with Jérôme. The poor lad had neither superior intelligence, nor an agreeable physiognomy; he was born, as people said, under an unlucky planet. Whatever was the cause of joy and rejoicing to the rest of the world, seemed transformed for him into sorrow and punishment. Even his very name was a source of trouble. It had been borne by some member of the family for many generations, indeed ever since a certain Jerôme Lambert performed some heroic deed, which strangely enough history has left uncommemorated. The first Madame Lambert had positively refused to give the name to her eldest son, so it fell naturally to the

second, who did not complain when his brother's birthright was forced upon him; but who would nevertheless most thankfully have been delivered from the honour at more than one stage of his college life.

His step-mother treated him with constant severity, she thought him without heart and without intelligence, and felt humbled by his abrupt, awkward manners. It never once entered her head that this child stood more particularly in need of encouragement and tenderness, and yet any one who observed Jérôme with an impartial eye, could not fail to discover that he possessed many very precious qualities, which needed only to be appreciated and cultivated.

To love Jérôme was to become persuaded of the intensity of his power of loving. Notwithstanding the indifference with which he was treated, and the marked distinction made between him and his more favoured brother, he loved his stepmother with a curious mixture of fear and affection.

She was to him the personification of all that is excellent and charming. Often, if she embraced him, the child would go away to weep with joy in some lone corner, carefully concealing the overflowing tenderness which, had she known of it, might, perhaps, have won her heart to sympathy. Jérôme had never known his own mother; she died a few days after his birth, so that he could not mourn her loss; but he had long nourished in the depths of his

heart, a secret thought which he dared not mention. He felt sure he was a stray child, whom his parents had adopted, carefully concealing the fact from him, and thus it was only natural that they should love his brother best. These dismal thoughts chiefly troubled him in the evening; and then he would seriously resolve to starve himself to death.

But the next morning at breakfast, this determination vanished, like the shadows of the night before the golden luminary of day, and left no other trace than the ordinary appetite of a boy of twelve.

Whenever he had been scolded more than usual, Jérôme was very angry with himself for having failed in his resolution, and determined to be true to his purpose on the morrow. So the days passed by, and Jérôme visibly grew and prospered. Not a soul could possibly have imagined that he entertained such terrible designs.

And yet the crisis arrived. The letter that M. Hervé received from his sister announced that Jérôme had run away from home; nobody knew why or wherefore. Overcome, as we have seen, by this news, M. Hervé set out instantly for Lyons. On reaching his destination, he found that the little fugitive had returned home the evening before, having been absent two days and two nights.

Madame Lambert was in the drawing-room, reading the paper, when her brother entered.

"God be praised!" exclaimed M. Hervé, as he embraced her. "I am too late to be of any use to

you. Where is the poor child? What has happened to him? How was he found?"

"He is in his own room," said Madame Lambert. "I have not seen him to-day. He must be made to feel that his conduct merits severe punishment. A little solitude will do him good."

"I think his mother's presence would do him more good," said M. Hervé; "but tell me how it all happened."

"It is a strange story, and I really cannot understand myself how things came to such a pass. Four or five days ago we had a dinner party. I was much displeased with Jérôme, and sent him to his room. His papa went to speak to him, but could make nothing whatever of the child, who said he wanted to see me, and begged many times that I would go to him. You understand how impossible it was for me to leave the company to gratify this caprice. We left him, thinking he would fall asleep; but when every one had left, and I was ready to go and see him, the room was empty—the child had disappeared. We passed two days in the most frightful suspense, making fruitless search and enquiry in all directions, when, last evening he made his appearance, and begged us to forgive him. No doubt hunger caused him to return, and yet he had still some money in his pocket."

"I am convinced it was *not* hunger that brought him back," said M. Hervé; "I shall go and see him at once."

He went up to the child's room, and found him in bed, with his face turned towards the wall. Jérôme did not look round when the door was opened, but when his uncle (for so he called M. Hervé) approached him, and took his hand, he whispered:

"Mamma will not come, then?"

"Yes she will, my child," replied M. Hervé; "but you have seriously grieved her: your conduct has been such as to merit punishment, and you must accept it without complaint."

He talked to him for a long time, with affection mingled with firmness, but could not succeed in opening his little closed-up heart. All that he could learn was, that he had walked more than a whole day upon the road to Valence, hoping to reach the sea-coast, and engage himself as cabin-boy on board a vessel. Happily, he had not enough money to pay his passage by steamer, but he hoped to have sufficient to buy bread with, until he should reach the end of his journey. On the morning of the second day, he was so miserable at the thought that he was leaving for ever all he loved on earth, that he had no choice,—he was compelled to retrace his steps.

"It was cowardly," said he, as he finished his recital. "I had not courage to go on to the end."

"What was cowardly, my child, was not the coming back, but the departure."

"Oh! uncle," exclaimed Jérôme, looking at him with astonishment, as if the words presented an entirely new idea.

"Yes, it was weakly yielding to a temptation that your heart and conscience ought equally to have repelled."

Jérôme thought his uncle little knew what he had suffered, but he made no remark.

This conversation strengthened M. Hervé's resolve to take the poor boy home with him. He was persuaded that country pleasures, the society of his cousins, and the mild influence of a love almost maternal, which his aunt would lavish on him, would be of much greater use than the severity with which his parents thought it right to treat him. He spoke of it to his sister, and even suggested the idea of sending him to Paris with his own sons. Jérôme's parents did not seem disposed to negative the proposition.

Jérôme neither gave evidence of joy nor of sorrow. All seemed alike indifferent to him. He saw his mother; but whilst with her, appeared constrained and unhappy. He expressed no contrition, no remorse, no affection for those he was about to leave—one would have said he was utterly insensible. Madame Lambert, beside herself at this apparent apathy, said before him, in a moment of irritation: "The child has neither heart nor intelligence."

M. Hervé perceived, by his sudden paleness, that Jérôme had heard these words, which were certainly not intended for his ear. He had a private interview with his sister, and assured her that Jérôme was altogether different from what she believed him

to be; that he had a warm heart, and faculties capable of right development; that he only needed to be treated with a little tenderness, which by raising him in his own estimation, would cause him to become quite a different being, even as regarded outward appearance. She replied, that she knew the child better than any one, having lived with him for twelve years, and she was convinced that every effort to cultivate such a nature would most signally fail. Then she spoke of William, of his success, of his future, and left M. Hervé fully persuaded that unless she could be convinced of her mistake, it was not from her would come the fructifying beam that should light up and vivify the poor frozen soul of her child.

So they parted. Sad separation between the members of one family, where no sweet habit of intimacy, no tie of love is broken!

Jérôme spoke but seldom during the journey, and his uncle did not care to break the silence, thinking it better to let time and affection work their way.

The poor boy certainly had little outward attraction. His features were irregular, and his pale grey eyes seemed to betoken bad temper, rather than sadness.

The constant persuasion that he was disagreeable to those who surrounded him, had contracted his features, and greatly spoiled their expression.

"Poor child!" said M. Hervé to himself, as he

looked at him compassionately, "how much need he has of love!"

He did, indeed, need it. Young plants must have heat and light, and spring's gentle showers. When they have acquired a certain strength, they can resist the chilling influences of a gloomy day; but if heat and light fail them in the outset, they become colourless, blighted, and inodorous.

Evening had long closed in ere the travellers reached the White House. The drawing-room had been made to look even more bright and attractive than usual, to do them honour. As it had been a wet day, a little fire of vine-wood burnt cheerily on the spacious hearth; a small table was spread near it. The brackets were ornamented with vases of beautiful flowers. The children had all had permission to sit up to receive their papa and cousin. Books, work, and divers games, which had helped to keep them awake, were scattered in interesting confusion over a large table drawn up to the couch on which Madame Hervé usually reclined. Nothing could give a better idea than this apartment of the happiness of their family life.

M. Hervé was received with fewer demonstrations than he would have been favoured with, had he returned alone.

The cousins had not met for several years, and thus were almost strangers to each other; poor Jérôme had to submit to a pretty close examination, whilst he drank his cup of chocolate. He appeared not a little

frightened, and only replied to the affectionate advances of his aunt by unintelligible monosyllables. Not wishing to prolong his penance, and thinking that the cousins would more easily make each other's acquaintance the next morning, M. Hervé was not long before he showed Jérôme to his little chamber, which was next to that occupied by his cousins. The moment he left the drawing-room, the tongues were unloosed, and there was a general chorus of remark and exclamation.

"How funny he looks," said little Isabelle.

"Hush!" said Clémence, "he will hear you; they have scarcely closed the door."

"I don't think I shall like him much," said Robert, "he does not seem at all merry."

"Nor I either," added Clémence. "He makes me think of a bear badly trained."

"You shall teach him good manners, then," said Eugène, laughing. "As for me, I will love him, if nobody else will!"

Poor Jérôme! Such was the measure of benevolence excited by his arrival at the White House; but when he was in bed and the candle extinguished, just as his ideas began to be confused, and his limbs tranquillized by approaching sleep, a light hand was placed upon his head; a voice murmured: "May God bless thee, my poor child!" and a fond kiss was imprinted on his brow. This caress appeared to him so ravishingly sweet, that he dared not move for fear of breaking the spell; and the next day he altogether

lacked the courage to ask his aunt whether it was really she who had come to kneel by his bed-side. He felt very happy, but even more sad.

"Oh! if my mother had done that but once, only once!" he said to himself continually.

The remembrance of his guilty dissimulation was now fading a little from Eugène's mind. He began to be accustomed to the burden of sin, and conscience was less loud in its condemnation.

He had, however, felt profoundly humbled, when his father expressed to them all assembled his satisfaction at their good conduct during his absence. If he had only been alone with him! then he would have thrown himself into his arms and confessed everything. But to do so before his sisters—before Robert, who had always thought him so scrupulously conscientious and honorable—before Jérôme above all, to whom he considered himself so infinitely superior, and whom he so loved to patronise! no, it was quite impossible! He waited for another opportunity, and did not remark that he was hardening himself in evil. Again, when the visit to the castle was spoken of, he had another painful moment to pass through. Its very name made him shudder. The famous shooting party was arranged for the following day, and it was decided that soon afterwards they should accept the kind invitation of Madame d'Ermance.

"Two days of pleasure, children!" said M. Hervé "why it is enough to turn your heads. But Jérôme,

my little citizen, do you think you shall be able to get up and go to breakfast with us on the mountain-side?"

Jérôme thought it would be delightful; but the next day, when Robert entered the room, shook him, rolled him over and over, without being able to arouse him, and finished by dragging him out of bed by the feet, screaming all the time that he must make haste or he would be too late, and they should have to go without him, he found the pleasure smaller in reality than in perspective. He needed time—a great deal of time, to put on his stockings and to find his neck-tie, which was still more difficult, half asleep as he was. When at length he ran down stairs, he was not a little ashamed to find everybody waiting for him outside the hall door.

"You must learn to do things quickly, my dear; a child should never keep people waiting."

Jérôme, without reply, put on his game-bag, and followed his uncle and cousins into the grey morning light, into which the rays of the rising sun were just beginning to penetrate.

CHAPTER IV.

A DAY'S SHOOTING.

THE four early pedestrians descended the dewy slope of the orchard to the little bridge which separated them from the opposite hill. M. Hervé crossed it with a firm step, making the slight plank creak and rebound beneath his feet.

Eugène and Robert followed; but when they turned to look for Jérôme, they were much surprised to see him still standing on the other side of the stream, with one foot upon the plank, looking at the quiet water, as it ran beneath him, the very picture of despair.

"Well, Jérôme, what are you waiting for?" said his uncle; "make haste, my boy; we cannot be stopped at every step."

"I dare not!" said Jérôme, in pitiful accents.

"It is not possible!" cried Robert, bursting into a loud laugh.

"Silence!" replied M. Hervé: "your cousin has been brought up in the city, and has scarcely ever walked anywhere but in the public gardens. It is not at all surprising that he should not be accustomed

to bridges without handrails. Come, Jérôme, my boy, a little courage! Conquer the first step, and all will be easy. Advance bravely, and look straight before you."

Jérôme obeyed; but, arrived half way, where being furthest removed from the points of support, the rocking of the plank was most sensible, he again stopped; and this time nothing could induce him to resume the effort.

Robert was obliged to hold his sides with laughing, but Eugène took pity on his cousin, and going a few steps toward him, gave him his hand, and drew him safely on to *terra firma*.

Cows, not less alert than our sportsmen, were already in the pastures, a little less lively than usual, it may be, cropping now and then a few tufts of grass, and watching with a dreamy look those who so early trod the narrow pathway. The longer they walked, the more our four pedestrians felt invigorated by the pure fresh morning air, and when the sun, emerging from behind a cloud, which had long obscured its splendour, bathed the tops of the trees, and the summit of the mountain, in an ocean of light, its foot resting in shadow, Robert and Eugène absolutely shouted for joy.

It was the sure promise of a splendid day.

They soon reached the edge of a deep and precipitous ravine, which, after following for a while, it was necessary to descend, and to climb on the opposite side: the distance would thus be considerably shortened, and they would, without any very long

circuit, reach the base of the mountain. Hazels, young oaks, and acacias, mingled with the broom which clothed the steep sides of the ravine. There was no footpath, so M. Hervé chose a spot where the descent was less abrupt, and where it would be comparatively easy to proceed in zigzags. Those who were not particularly expert might guide themselves by holding on to the friendly broom, which grew to a most convenient height from the ground. Robert and Eugène disdained such assistance, and set off at such speed down the stony descent, that they ran imminent risk of spraining their ancles.

As to poor Jérôme; a new trial awaited him. His uncle had offered him his hand; but, fearing to expose himself to fresh raillery, he had refused it. He let every one go on before, then began to descend very slowly, never taking a fresh step without having recourse to a fresh prop.

The others watched him, for they had all safely reached the bottom before he had set out. This troubled him, and, making a desperate effort, he began to run, but, soon losing his balance, fell, and cut his hands and face sadly on the rough angular stones. M. Hervé was sorry he had not insisted on giving him his hand from the first, and climbing up again to him, helped him down without further accident. Robert could not restrain a joke or two at his expense; but Eugène, seeing that he had already a large lump on his forehead, ran to the stream, steeped his handkerchief in the water, and made a

bandage of it. The poor lad was touched with his kindness, but it was not in his nature to express what he felt. After having again ascended with some difficulty on the opposite side, they began to follow the narrow overgrown pathway, which led to the mountain. Diana, a beautiful young setter, with smooth skin and intelligent eye, walked quietly by her master's side; she seemed to be reserving her ardour for the moment the longed-for signal should be given. The graceful animal had all the elegance and beauty of form characteristic of her race; she was of a fine shining grey; her forehead was ornamented with a white star, irregular in its contour, but clearly marked. She liked the children, and received their caresses with a good grace; but all her love, all her obedience, all her devotion, was for her master, whose will she often seemed to study in his eyes.

The base of the mountain was covered by copses that abounded in game, and more especially so at this early period of the season, for they were as yet unravaged by the relentless fowling-piece. Diana went before them to start the game. The report of guns was heard at intervals; and the children, highly amused, ran hither and thither, searching amongst the bushes for whatever fell. Diana, guided by her instinct, always took the lead, and bore back triumphantly first a hare, then a partridge, then some smaller birds which M. Hervé bagged, without seeming to care much about them.

"It is not every day that one meets with such good fortune," said he, as he stopped and seated himself in the glade on the trunk of a tree, which must have lain there a long time, for it was entirely covered with moss, and mushrooms were growing in the holes formerly occupied by its roots. "We have earned our dinner."

The children hastened to take off their bags. Nothing had been forgotten, from the pie with golden crust to the refreshing fruits and the bottle of wine, which was more efficacious than all the rest in restoring their poor tired limbs after so long a walk.

The happy children began their meal in great glee. The branches of the hazel bent over them, and protected them from the rays of the sun, which would otherwise have fallen directly upon their heads.

No other sound was heard than the sweet song of the birds, already become less frequent and less distinctly audible, for it was autumn. This tranquillity, this silence, contrasted vividly with the more active and noisy pleasures of the morning.

Suddenly Jérôme burst into tears.

"What is the matter, my boy?" asked M. Hervé, anxiously.

"I wish mamma were here!" said he, and he continued to weep.

The beauty and extreme loveliness of all that surrounded him, had awakened his most lively

affections. Perhaps he thought that, in the midst of this quiet nature, his mother could not have done otherwise than show him a little affection.

M. Hervé consoled him as well as he could, and tried to make him understand the loving-kindness of our heavenly Father, who has created this world so beautiful, that we might be surrounded by the visible tokens of His love. Jérôme listened very attentively to this discourse; he did not say much, but his uncle's words sank deeply into his heart, and for the first time in his life, he felt an emotion of gratitude to that God of whom he had indeed sometimes heard, but in language too cold to awaken his heart to love.

After dinner, they laid themselves to rest upon the soft moss. Some made a pillow of their bags; others contented themselves with spreading a handkerchief under their heads. Diana lay at her master's feet, a little curious to know why the sport should not be resumed; and in that great silence which, towards noon, reigns in the woods, as in a temple, from which the crowd has departed, where the human voice is no longer heard, and where there remains only an invisible Presence, — every one fell asleep.

M. Hervé took only a short nap, but when he looked around him, the three little sleepers appeared so perfectly happy, that he had not the heart to disturb them. He again sought his make-believe pillow, and as he did not push his love of sporting

to extremes, it gave him no trouble to deny himself the continuance of the good fortune which had smiled upon the commencement of the day.

But the children awoke one after the other. The shadows had begun to lengthen upon the broad sloping meadows ere they reached the edge of the forest. The boys could scarcely believe that the day was so soon over. As they were nicely rested, M. Hervé proposed that they should go a little out of their way to visit the "weeping rock." This name excited their imaginations, and they were a little disappointed on their arrival to find one of the most simple of natural curiosities: for they had imagined it would be something very marvellous. As it was, it was merely a sort of grotto, not wider than it was deep, formed by three or four masses of rock placed one over the other. From one of them a drop of water fell every half-minute, with monotonous regularity, upon a stone placed beneath, in which, as it always fell precisely on the same spot, a little basin had been gradually excavated. How many centuries, or perhaps thousands of years, had been meted out in this retreat by the fall of that solitary drop, which seemed to be a tear shed from all eternity by the eye of some invisible being. The children themselves, who at first had thought it nothing extraordinary, felt the charm, and did not wish to go. It was necessary to do so, however. The White House was hidden from their sight by a bend of the hill, but the little church of St. Réal, and a few of the dwellings scat-

tered around it, appeared in the distance, illumined by the last rays of the setting sun. This time they chose the high road, which wound like a broad white ribbon round the dusky slopes. The three children, tired with their day's excursion, notwithstanding the long halt that had from time to time relieved them, walked not very briskly by the side of M. Hervé. The moon was nearly full, and they caught an occasional glimpse of her from behind a curtain of poplars which, on three sides, bordered a large tract of marshy land. A few stars, looking very pale in presence of their Queen, were to be seen scattered at great distances in the clear evening sky.

"Where are we?" asked Eugène.

"We are very near a house well known to me," said M. Hervé. "Do you not see behind those trees to the right, a low, gloomy-looking dwelling? They call it the Sapinière. It bears a bad name in the country round; people say it brings evil upon all its inhabitants. Certainly there has seemed to be some reason for such a report. Two of the families who have resided there during the last ten years have had more than ordinary trials. In one of them, the father and eldest son were accused and found guilty of a crime, and sent off as convicts to Toulon. In the other, four children died in the same week, of a contagious disease, and their broken-hearted mother soon followed them to the grave. Since then I do not think any other disaster has happened there; but it strikes me, as far as I can judge by the light

of the moon, that the house looks as dismal and desolate as ever.

At this moment, Eugène groaned. He had made a false step, and had twisted his foot. Pain forced him to stop.

"Oh," said he, "I have hurt myself so much! I really cannot walk any further."

After several ineffectual attempts, they were obliged to admit that the poor child really could not go on without great suffering, and without risk of seriously aggravating the evil. There was only one course to pursue,—to enter the house of which they had spoken, and ask assistance from its inmates.

Eugène disliked doing so extremely, but he could not walk, so he was obliged to submit.

M. Hervé took him in his arms, and carried him to the door. He knocked twice before any answer was returned; the third time some one said, "Come in!" and the door was opened.

"Who is there?" asked the same voice, which seemed to come from some neighbouring apartment.

"My son has sprained his ankle in descending the mountain," replied M. Hervé, "and being near your house, we are come to ask you for some assistance." "Excuse me," answered the voice, which was that of a woman, "I am ill and cannot leave my bed; and my poor little girl is blind."

They could not indeed doubt that the little child, who was seated in a corner of the room they were in, was really blind; a faint ray of moonlight showed

that her large motionless eyes had an expression of sadness quite in contrast with the other features of her pretty face.

M. Hervé asked if he could not possibly have some cold water, some salt, and a little old linen to make a bandage for the ailing foot.

"I have everything necessary," said the poor woman, "the difficulty is to give it to you. Light the lamp, Esther, perhaps your little brother may soon come in, he will find us what we want. In the meantime, pray be seated, gentlemen. It is but poor hospitality that an invalid and a little blind girl can give you."

The child found a match, took the lamp from the large old chimney-piece, where she knew it was always kept, and acquitted herself with much tact and readiness of this little duty, which a child who could see would not have accomplished half so well.

When the flickering light of the lamp was a little more steady, M. Hervé examined Eugène's foot. He soon convinced himself that nothing serious was the matter, and that the pressure of a bandage would be sufficient help to allow him to walk as far as St. Réal without too much suffering; though afterwards he would have to remain very quiet for several days. Then he looked round the room they were in. It was a large, poorly furnished kitchen, and could boast of very few cooking

utensils. The door of the room occupied by the invalid opened at one end; and opposite to it was a wooden staircase, leading to the upper story. The miserable aspect of the house and its furniture, together with the sad memories attaching to its history gave it really a sinister appearance.

The little blind girl had again seated herself near the open window and appeared to be listening intently.

"Here comes Gaspard," cried she suddenly.

"If she hears him, it is really he, and he is not far off either," said her mother; "the child never makes a mistake."

And so it was. In less than two minutes the door opened, and a great boy of fifteen or sixteen entered. His features were very harsh, his complexion dark, his hair black. The expression of his countenance did not speak much in his favour at first sight; but on closer examination it was evident that it did at least denote uprightness and honesty.

His mother explained to him what had brought the strangers beneath their roof. He gave M. Hervé what was necessary for binding up the disabled foot, then went out again, without having uttered one word more than was strictly required.

A few minutes afterwards, a little fair-haired boy entered the room. Eugène knew him again as the youngest of the three naughty boys, whom he, alas! had such good reason to remember. The little fellow knew him too, for he cast a furtive glance upon him,

which expressed anything but pleasure at this unexpected meeting; but, as if by common consent, they were both silent.

"Where have you been, Julien?"

"In the garden, mother!"

"In the garden, are you quite sure? Come to me, I want to speak to you."

But the little boy pretended not to hear his mother's command, and contented himself by repeating sullenly, that he had only been in the garden.

Robert went up to him, and asked him who was the great boy who had just gone out.

"It must have been my brother Gaspard," answered the child, looking round in some anxiety. "I did not think he would come home so soon."

"Your brother is not much like you; have you any others?"

"Yes,—I mean no," replied Julien much embarassed.

"Julien!" exclaimed his mother, "come to me."

A firm step was heard without, the door opened. This time Julien did not need telling twice, he ran quickly into the little bedroom.

M. Hervé had been too much occupied with his care of the wounded foot, to pay much attention to what had passed around him; but Eugène, notwithstanding all he suffered, did not lose the most trifling incident. The man who entered looked like another Gaspard, only that he was older, taller,

stronger, and that the expression of his countenance was even more stern and severe. When he had heard the history of the little accident which explained the presence of strangers in his dwelling, he said he would take them home in his cart, though it would not be very comfortable for them.

M. Hervé accepted his offer, for he thought entire rest would be the best thing for Eugène.

"Where is Julien?" asked the father, before he went out to harness his horse.

"He is here with me," replied the mother's voice; it trembled a little.

"How long has he been in?"

"He has been with me all the evening."

Whilst speaking thus in a low voice, the invalid seemed to make a violent effort over herself. Eugène was so much surprised that he could scarcely restrain an exclamation. The father looked for an instant in apparent doubt and threatening on his wife and child, and then he turned quickly away.

In a few minutes, the cart was before the door. Eugène reclined upon a thick layer of straw which did not, however, prevent his being painfully alive to the violent joltings which shook him at every step, and to which of course his lame foot was most sensitive.

When he was alone with his mother, Julien took her hand, and began to caress her.

"Naughty child!" said she, pretending to repulse, whilst she really drew him towards her, "do

you know that all this will end badly, and then what will become of us? Your father's anger will be fearful!"

"Oh, dear little mother, don't be sorry: father looked so very stern, he would have flogged me if he had known. I assure you it was not telling a lie."

"And what was it then, miserable child? If you would but do as your father bids you, I should not be obliged to deceive him to save you from punishment."

"Hush, mother! Gaspard is coming."

"Where were you when I came in the first time?" asked Gaspard.

"In the garden," replied Julien, trying in vain to speak without faltering, for he was almost as much afraid of his brother, as he was of his father.

"It is not true," said Gaspard, "you know you are telling me a lie; speak the truth, you may just as well, because I know."

"Gaspard, I will not have a disturbance here; I cannot bear it," said the invalid, in a tone of supplication.

"Mother," replied the young man in accents so solemn, that the poor woman was quite impressed by them; "It grieves me to give you pain; but you do not see that by your weakness you are sacrificing this child. And yet, in our family at least, we ought to fear a lie."

These last words were pronounced in a half whisper, but the invalid heard them, and groaned aloud.

Gaspard went nearer, took his mother's hand, and kissed it with a degree of tenderness of which you would not have thought him capable.

"Forgive me," said he; "but I entreat you, mother, do not allow Julien to deceive our father any longer. It would be a hundred times better for him to be severely punished, and made to weep now, however bitterly, whilst he is a child, than to become hardened in guilt, and be one day lost to us, like ——"

"Silence! do not utter that name."

"No, I will not utter it; but how can one help thinking of him?"

"Ah, Gaspard, I wish I had listened to you," said the poor woman, wringing her hands; "it is too late now!"

Gaspard had a singular influence over his mother, weak as she was in body and mind. She recognized in him, it is true, the same rigid adherence to principle as in her husband; but this very inflexibility which in the one case made her tremble, tempered as it was in the other by youth and by the relationship existing between them, inspired her with a kind of security. She loved to feel herself governed and soothed by her son. Certainly, she felt for him nothing that could be compared to that blind passionate tenderness with which she doted upon Julien. The two kinds of affection were entirely dissimilar. As for Gaspard, he saw the faults and weaknesses of

his mother, but without judging her. He no more thought of accusing her of them than he would accuse her of a natural bodily infirmity. He loved her sincerely, not quite as a son loves the mother who teaches him the value of life, at the same time that she instructs him to fulfil its varied duties, but rather as one loves the weak.

He told her that it was not too late, and that the only way to attack the root of the evil was to make a general confession to his father of all that had been done contrary to his will. But neither Julien nor his mother felt equal to adopt such a courageous resolution.

"What have I done after all?" said the child sullenly. "It is nothing so very bad to go and play with the children in the village."

Julien put an end to the conversation by going up to bed. He occupied the same room as his brother, and when Gaspard laid himself to rest by his side, he made believe to be sleeping most profoundly.

Whilst this little scene was passing in the gloomy house called the Sapinière, M. Hervé tried, by a few judicious questions, to obtain the confidence of Gaspard and Julien's father, but he found it no easy matter. All he could learn was that his name was Guillaumin, and that he had only been a few weeks in that part of the country. He thought he had discovered too that a heavy load of sorrow was pressing upon his poor closed-up heart. Neither his language nor that of his wife and children, at all resembled

the dialect of the peasantry. There was a mystery about them that M. Hervé would fain have penetrated, not from motives of curiosity, but because feelings of real interest had been awakened in his heart. He would also have liked to offer some money to their driver, as a little remuneration for his trouble; but when the cart stopped at the door of the White House, he saw on his countenance such an expression of half-concealed pride, that he could not venture to do so. M. Hervé, therefore, contented himself for the moment with merely thanking him, hoping that sooner or later he might have it in his power to render him an equal service.

The White House was very gay to welcome the four wanderers. The autumnal fire burned brightly on the hearth, without throwing out too much heat to be agreeable; the table had been drawn near it, and covered by Clémence with all that she supposed needful to recruit the poor famished sportsmen. But the little boys, who under other circumstances would have done ample justice to such a repast, were none of them at all disposed to do so at present. Robert and Jérôme, spite of their efforts, continued the sleep which had been commenced on the journey; Eugène suffered from his foot; the sprain, though a slight one, alarmed his mother sufficiently to cause her to send at once for the doctor. The poor child's heart was oppressed; he knew now what it was to feel that there was a falsehood between himself and his family, between himself and God. This evening too, he could

not pray, and although very tired, it was long before he fell asleep. In the morning, when he embraced his mother, he felt more than ever entangled in the net, which a moment of cowardice had spread beneath his feet.

CHAPTER V.

ARTHUR AND HIS PROFESSOR.

Some days certainly are inauspicious. Who can doubt it? Not Arthur d'Ermance on the morning on which we make his acquaintance,—the very day, be it said, of the pleasant sporting excursion, that we have so lately described. He awoke in a very bad temper, and, as all went wrong with him, he found fault with everybody and everything, the guilty party only excepted. He really thought there was a general conspiracy against him. His stockings would not allow themselves to be put on, the tiresome shirt-buttons would not pass through the button-holes; his hair persisted in taking the most unpleasing turn upon his forehead, and in rising in a tuft at the top of his head, just as if he were an Iroquois. Lastly, his neck-tie, which also obstinately refused to be fastened in a becoming manner, was thrown to the other end of the room, where it remained hanging on the back of an easy-chair, looking most sadly out of place; whilst the victim of all these improperly-behaved objects went out slamming the door so violently, as to make the whole house tremble.

Arthur, eyes and mouth alike bespeaking a troubled spirit, repaired, according to custom, to his grandmother's chamber; she had not yet risen, but received him with the most tender caresses. His chocolate awaited him on a little stand near her. He seated himself and put his elbows on the table, without showing any intention of beginning his breakfast.

"What is the matter, dear child?" asked Madame d'Ermance. "Are you not well?"

"I am not hungry," replied the little boy.

"That is not natural! At your age one is hungry as soon as ever one jumps out of bed. Would you like anything better than chocolate?"

"No!"

"Tell me what ails you, my treasure! Is there any little wish that I can gratify? You know I will do anything that is in my power. Tell me now!"

"I do not want anything."

"Would you like to go a ride on your pony to-day with Benedict?"

"That would not amuse me at all!"

"And to go out shooting in the park,—they say there are plenty of hares?"

"No; I cannot endure going out shooting with those village children. It is always Benedict who kills the hare, and those little peasants are as stupid as they can possibly be. It is always Master Arthur here, Master Arthur there! It's a perfect bore!"

"Oh, Arthur, what a vulgar expression! I am sorry you should copy the coarse language of those

children. In showing you respect, they prove that their parents have taught them well. They know that if they forgot to render you your due, the entrance to the park would be at once denied them."

"All that does not prevent my being dreadfully dull," said Arthur, gaping so vehemently that the corners of his mouth really seemed in danger.

"Look, look! there is M. Hermann coming up the avenue. I had entirely forgotten that it was the day for my Latin lesson. So much the worse for him. You must wait, sir! I have not even begun my breakfast. Besides, he is here before his time: it is not yet nine o'clock."

At the very moment, as if to contradict the little boy's assertion, and justify the Latin-master, the clock distinctly struck nine.

But the bare idea of the declensions had awakened in Arthur a very decided taste for chocolate, and slices of bread and butter. He set to work and ate so much, and spun out his breakfast so long, that even his indulgent grandmother thought he exceeded all bounds, and begged him to make haste.

During this time, M. Hermann awaited his pupil. He was professor at the college of a small town not far from the Castle d'Ermance. He was thoroughly acquainted with the dead languages; but all his learning had not given him that self-confidence which would have rendered his task so much more easy, namely, that of inspiring the rising generation with a horror of barbarisms, and a love for the

Greek roots, to which they showed themselves sadly averse. He had never once been able to seat himself at his desk without feeling his blood run cold at the thought of the trials that awaited him, from contact with the twenty unruly boys of whom his class was composed.

Arthur's lesson did not cause him much less apprehension. The slow, deliberate tone of the spoilt child deprived him of even the very small stock of presence of mind with which nature had endowed him. Arthur was not old enough to discern the solid merit which often lurks under an exterior rendered absurdly awkward by timidity, and treated his master without the slightest respect. On entering the room he bowed negligently to M. Hermann, who did not dare to address any reproach to him, for the length of time he had been kept waiting. But when he discovered that the little boy had prepared nothing for his lesson, conscience spoke louder than timidity, and he thought it is duty to remonstrate; but the speaker, whose voice trembled, appeared to suffer far more than the little boy to whom the expostulation was addressed.

After about an hour's study, "It is ten o'clock," exclaimed Arthur, suddenly closing his book.

"Ten minutes to ten, sir," said the Professor, as he looked at his watch, "and we have only just made a beginning."

"Indeed, it seems to me we ought to have finished long ago."

The poor master was a little put out of countenance by this reply.

"Look here, M. Hermann, don't be angry."

M. Hermann angry! He never thought of such a thing.

"Let us talk French a little; it will not send one to sleep like Latin. Do you think people can possibly have said anything amusing in this fusty old language?"

"I think that the Greek and Latin languages have served to express the finest thoughts that have ever been conceived," replied M. Hermann, who thus saw himself attacked on his own territory.

"It is singular how willingly I would remain in ignorance of all these fine things. It seems to me one ought to be old to have a taste for such antiquities."

"And yet my son is not old. He is only just turned sixteen, and there is nothing in the world he delights in so much as the study of the classics."

"Ah, yes! You have often spoken to me of him. The very thought of all his learning makes me yawn! Is he, then, a genius?"

"No, sir. But Jean Paul is remarkably gifted. Unfortunately, he finds himself stopped short just at the moment when he has conquered the first difficulties. He has neither books nor masters. It is a great trouble to us both."

"But why do you not send him to Paris?"

"We cannot," replied M. Hermann, with a profound sigh.

A few minutes later, and the poor professor was away again, raising quite unconsciously clouds of dust beneath his feet, and turning over in his mind many sad, but not bitter, thoughts. He pictured to himself the Castle that he had just left, its gorgeous apartments, the spacious, well-filled library, the child to whom every facility was offered for an education, for which he so little cared; and then, in spite of himself, his thoughts wandered off to his own small dwelling, into which were crowded seven children, and where he sought in vain a retreat for the calm, quiet enjoyment of his favourite studies. He thought of the scanty volumes ranged along a few miserable planks of deal, and of the slender library at the college, to which he had, indeed, access, but which was wholly inadequate to cover the deficiencies of his own store; above all, he thought of his own son, so studious, so greedy of knowledge, and who was yet forced by poverty to stop at the very outset of that career for which his extraordinary talents seemed to destine him. His heart was oppressed; but he did not murmur, for his piety was humble and sincere, and he firmly believed that God doeth all things well.

His anxious brow relaxed a little when he entered the large room in which all his family were assembled, about the hour of noon. His eldest daughter was spreading the cloth, another sat at work, a third amused the baby in its cradle, whilst a little boy seated on the floor, thundered away on

his drum in such a manner as must have prevented the best or most phlegmatic infant from sleeping. In a corner of the room, so absorbed that nothing going on around him could be the slightest disturbance, sat Jean Paul, the eldest son, resting both elbows on a table before him. The mother was busy in a little kitchen, the door of which was ajar; she turned round on hearing the well-known sound of her husband's footsteps; and the tender smile with which she greeted him, totally banished every lingering trace of melancholy.

The professor's house was a very humble dwelling. Nine persons had to live upon his modest salary; but, notwithstanding many privations and cares, added to untiring effort, they were happy. They not only loved, but admired each other, and every one had a most implicit faith in the merit of the rest. Jean Paul was the glory of this numerous family; his father was proud of him, his mother was proud of him, his brothers and sisters, from the timid Julia who blushed every time he looked at her, to the rosy-cheeked urchin in the cradle, were all nurtured in the idea that it was their duty to be very proud of Jean Paul. Madame Hermann felt her heart dilate as she exclaimed:—

"Our Jean Paul will be a distinguished scholar! He is for ever buried in his books."

The day-dreams and acts of clumsiness of which the rising scholar was often guilty, were accepted as proofs of his mental superiority. Jean Paul was

never censured for breaking the beautiful China vase, so treasured by his mother, nor for having thrown little Fanny into empty space, instead of into her bed, as he supposed he had done. And yet, what nights of anguish this good mother had passed, watching over her poor little child who suffered from severe concussion of the brain, in consequence of this terrible accident: and how often had she regarded with a sigh the mantelpiece left desolate by the loss of the beautiful vase, of which it had hitherto been the sole but sufficient ornament.

We must confess that Jean Paul repented so bitterly of his clumsy acts, was so inconsolable at their consequences, confessed with such true humility that he was good for nothing, that it would have been impossible to have been angry with him, even if he had not redeemed his errors by successes of another kind. He was very sweet and modest, although they did surround him with so much honour in his own home. He allowed himself to be worried and disturbed by the children in the midst of his most profound studies, and always with a patience inexhaustible. The only reproach that could be made to him was that he did not always look very closely at the means he took to satisfy his little tormentors. He generally gave the first thing he could lay his hand upon. Poor Madame Hermann consoled herself for it, by saying, "Learned people are so absent!"

At the very moment the Professor put down his hat and books on entering the parlor, Fanny, a pretty

little fair child of four years old, had begun a series of persecutions against the poor student. She insisted on his giving her something from the table that was out of her reach, and as he did not hear her, she dragged at him on all sides, pinched him, pulled his hair, yet could not succeed in interrupting his reading. At length, however, he perceived that something harassed him, and his attention a little aroused, he supposed something might be wanted from the table, so, without raising his eyes a moment from his book, he reached out his hand, grasped the inkstand and threw all it contained over the flaxen ringlets of the poor child, who set up a terrible scream when she felt her little face deluged by this black and bitter torrent. Brought back at length to the world around him, Jean Paul saw with no small alarm the disaster he had occasioned. His mother raised her hands to Heaven, and lost in excessive astonishment the presence of mind which was habitual to her,—but Julia, the sweet active little housekeeper, did not forget herself for an instant. She seized a towel and wiped the head and face of her poor little sister, before the ink had time to trickle down on to her frock. It was not so easy to console her. She cried so loudly that a neighbour came in to ask if the child had hurt herself.

"Ah me! he gets no better then, that great innocent there!" said she, when she had learnt the cause of little Fanny's distress. "I assure you, neighbour, if I had a son like your's, I'd soon teach him to know his right hand from his left."

"Neighbour," replied Madame Hermann with great dignity, "we are quite satisfied with our son, just as he is. Do not trouble yourself with what does not concern you."

The good lady went away a little shocked, and nothing more was said of the accident.

But let us leave the Professor's family, and return to improve our acquaintance with Arthur d'Ermance.

To hear him talk, and indeed to look at him, you would scarcely have believed that Arthur had but just reached his twelfth year. He was tall, thin, and of an elegant figure. His being always accustomed to be made much of, to be listened to, and admired, to be allowed, moreover, to lay down the law to everybody around him, had given him more assurance than was usual in a boy of his age. It rarely occurred to him that anything he said or did could be worthy of reprehension. Punishment was a thing utterly unknown to him; and the observations of his grandmother, few and far between, went in at one ear, and out at the other, without producing any further effect than causing them to tingle a little more unpleasantly than was the case with more ordinary discourse.

At the decease of Arthur's father, her only son, Madame d'Ermance had gathered up all her affections to lavish them on this child, who had no one but herself to cling to. He had become the centre of her every thought. She did not wish that he should be ever contradicted or punished, or even

reproved by anyone but herself, and, as she seldom made use of the right she had reserved, year after year had passed without the child's having any idea that there was a law superior to his own will: and he firmly believed himself to be the sun around which his little world was obliged to revolve.

Thus it had happened, that Arthur d'Ermance, who was born with precious and loveable qualities, had gradually become a proud and self-willed child, even more insupportable to himself than to others.

Arthur had an uncle, M. Gérard, whom his father on his death-bed had appointed his son's guardian. M. Gérard had been travelling for many years, and had meddled very little with the child's education. Having returned home a few months before, his first care had been to come and see Arthur, and discuss with Madame d'Ermance whatever might relate to his character, his studies, or his future. He insisted very strongly on the necessity of sending him to school, as he wished to withdraw him from the enervating moral régime to which his grandmother's excessive tenderness had habituated him. Madame d'Ermance at first altogether repulsed the idea; she thought it cruel both to herself and the child, but she had at length yielded to the reiterated arguments of M. Gérard, and being obliged to confess that Arthur was not all that could be desired, had consented to the separation, leaving it as a question of time, and inwardly resolving that the period should be very far distant.

After having a long conversation that day with her grandson's guardian, Madame d'Ermance was sad and dejected when she made her appearance at the dinner-table. She scarcely ate anything, and could not speak without an effort. Arthur paid no attention, he was far too much absorbed in his own feelings to be able to divine those of others.

When he retired to rest, his grandmother followed him to his room. "Sit down by me a moment; I want to speak to you, my child. Your uncle thinks you want a different kind of life from that you lead here with me: perhaps he is right, and, notwithstanding all it costs me to part with you, I have consented to let you go to school."

Madame d'Ermance waited anxiously to see what effect this communication would have upon Arthur. She was excessively surprised to see his face light up at the word school.

"To school, oh what a blessing! Why it is just what I longed for. Grandmamma, will it be in Paris, if only it may be in Paris!"

"You think nothing of the pain of parting, Arthur," said Madame d'Ermance sorrowfully.

"Ah I know, Grandmamma, and it makes me very sad; but I shall write to you, and six months will soon be over."

"My child, my poor child, this time which to you appears so short, is perhaps all I have to live, and I should have liked to keep you near me to the end."

"Please, grandmamma, don't say such dismal things, you know I never can endure them! You will live a very long time, and I will always come and pass the vacations with you. Why I declare that will amuse me just as much as going to school. What a good thing that Uncle Gérard is come back!"

Madame d'Ermance sighed, embraced the little boy, and slowly left the room. She had thought herself more necessary to him. It was a cruel lesson. When she had closed the door, Arthur said to himself as he began to undress.

"I love grandmamma very dearly; but still I cannot pass all my life with women: she really must let me become a man."

Poor Arthur! he little thought what becoming a man means, and what a difficult apprenticeship he must serve ere he attained the goal.

CHAPTER VI.

THE KNIGHT'S TOWER.

THE long expected day had arrived. Every one was in movement at the White House. Eugène, completely recovered, had obtained permission to be of the party. Clémence and Isabelle in clean white frocks, impatiently awaited the signal of departure. The boys who were less quietly inclined and not so much afraid of spoiling their appearance, went through a series of gymnastic exercises by way of preface to the pleasures of the day. There had hitherto been very little intercourse between the two families, so that Arthur and the brothers were but slightly acquainted. As to Jérôme, everything was new to him; but he so rarely gave expression to his feelings, that one might have been tempted to imagine he was neither influenced by joy nor curiosity.

Clémence employed herself during a considerable part of their walk, in exhorting her little sister to be very polite, and to observe all the rules of good breeding.

Her mother was not well enough to accompany

them. Madame Reason felt, therefore, that a great weight of responsibility rested upon her. She quite despaired of inducing "the boys" to abide by her code of politeness and good manners, and was, therefore, doubly anxious that at least her little sister should do her honour.

Isabelle, who had rarely left her home, and never without her mother, listened to it all with a seriousness and desire to do right, that gave a most charming expression to her large brown eyes.

After having listened to the lecture, in which Clémence told her, that as soon as she had said "Good morning!" she must sit down quietly in the drawing room, and not venture to touch anything without permission: that she must not run, nor cry, nor fall down, nor tear her frock, nor speak unless to answer "Yes, Madame," or "No, Madame," to the questions that might be addressed to her: that she must not eat too much, but must refuse every time that Clémence made her a sign to do so: the poor little thing, quite overpowered by all these prohibitions and restrictions, cried out in a tone of childish despair.

"But, Clémence, I shall be so very tired!"

"What does that matter?" said Robert, ironically, "everybody came into the world to weary themselves as politely as they could, did they not, Clémence? The real end of existence, little one, and the sooner you get it into your head the better, is, not to tumble one's frock."

"Clémence, let the child be natural," said M. Hervé, "let her amuse herself freely, as is right at her age. I hope my little Isabelle will behave nicely, because she knows that would please dear mamma if she could see her; but she may be gay and happy, and amuse herself as much as ever she can."

Clémence said nothing, but she wore a little air of injured dignity. She evidently thought it now devolved on her alone to keep up the honour of the family manners. A repast awaited their arrival. The elder people conversed together, so that, whilst sitting at the table, the children looked at each other almost without talking. Suddenly Eugène's attention was aroused by a few words spoken by Madame d'Ermance. "I should have liked to offer you a basket of my peaches which are celebrated for their beauty and size; but, strange to say, my wall-fruit has been stolen on two occasions, by some good-for-nothing scoundrels, who have had the sense to avoid being caught, although Vigilant is certainly not a dog to let thieves enter into the garden unmolested. I cannot at all understand how it happened. Since their second visit, which took place the day before yesterday, we have resolved to let him loose earlier than usual. My old gardener is in the greatest consternation. He says he has lived fifty years in this part of the country, and nothing of the sort ever occurred before. The people were all so honest that one might very well have dispensed with locks and bolts

and even with doors to all the houses. It must certainly have been some fresh comers, who have not the honour of their country at heart. However, we shall soon know, for we have taken our measures that the robbers may not escape us a third time. Only see what miserable fruit I am obliged to offer you!"

During this discourse, Eugène had repeatedly changed colour. It seemed to him as if every eye would soon be fixed upon him, and that he would be branded as an accomplice of the thieves. At length the signal being given, the children were at liberty to withdraw from the table, and to run in the park on the soft green turf, over which wide spreading branches threw a gentle shadow. They dispersed on all sides, shouting for joy. Soon, weary of running without an object, the little people assembled at the foot of a large chestnut-tree to consult upon the best use they could make of their day. Arthur, accustomed to be obeyed, volunteered his opinion, which he thought unexceptionable.

"I will take you to the Knight's Tower," said he, "it is my favourite spot in the whole park."

"And what is the Knight's Tower?" asked the others, with lively curiosity.

"It is a wonderful ruin," said he; "come with me, and I will relate its history when we are there."

The Knight's Tower did indeed look much more picturesque than might have been expected. Situated on a gentle eminence, and surrounded with luxuriant vegetation, portions of which had taken

root in the crevices of its ancient stone-work, it seemed to stand there amidst the young and living nature, as a representative of the poetry of by-gone ages. They seated themselves in a semicircle on some mouldering stones in the interior of the tower, and Arthur commenced his narration, which suffered several interruptions from the questions of his auditory, and was on his side prolonged by occasional digressions. In fewer words, it is as follows :—

In the eleventh century, a knight retired to this solitary tower in order to expiate some crime known only to himself. His father, in despair at thus losing his son, who ought to have been the prop of his old age, came himself to the foot of the high and gloomy turret, and entreated him, with bitter groanings, to leave his voluntary prison, if he did not wish to bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave ; but the son turned a deaf ear to the old man's voice. Then came his brother in arms, with whom, during ten years, he had shared both difficulty and danger, and demanded if he must henceforth defend alone the cause of the poor and the oppressed,—but the valiant knight replied not. So at last came his promised bride, and very long she rested at the foot of the dismal tower, trying to change her lover's will by wild entreaty and by bitter wailing ; he did not even approach the narrow window of his cell to gaze, for the last time, on his betrothed, but a voice was distinctly audible, which said—'Get thee behind me, Satan!' The poor girl

withdrew, sadly weeping; and this was the brave knight's last conflict. From that day he neither saw a human being, nor heard a human voice. A faithful old servant carried a basket of the coarsest food, once a week in the hush of night, to the foot of the lonely tower. The captive let fall a cord, by the aid of which he drew the basket up to him. Once the cord did not descend at the accustomed hour, they understood that he was ill or dying—dead, perhaps. The door was forced open, and the penitent was found stretched on the narrow plank that had served him for a bed, entirely lifeless. No one who had seen him enter the tower a young and handsome knight, would have recognised him in this old man, whose mortal remains were as if ossified by solitude, fasting, and perhaps remorse. They buried him with all respect in a neighbouring monastery, and many a pilgrimage continued to be made by the devout to the Knight's Tower, until falling into ruin and become the chosen resort of the bird of the night, it ceased to be otherwise esteemed than as the crowning point of an agreeable excursion for lovers of the picturesque.

After having listened to this legend, which Arthur almost knew by heart, so often had he read it in the "Records and Traditions of the Ruins of France," the children regarded the tower with entirely different sentiments. It seemed now to bear the impress of that poetry of the middle ages which has such a potent charm for the youthful imagination. But

Isabelle could not at all forgive the poor knight for having said to his intended bride—"Get thee behind me, Satan!"

"Do you not understand that she represented one of the temptations which he had to overcome, in order to remain faithful to his vow?" said Eugène. "It was the last, and perhaps, the strongest. That repulsed, he was sure of himself."

Seated on the steps of the broken stair case which was now covered with verdure, but still available as far as the first story of the building, they chatted for a long time over this mysterious history. They wondered what crime he could possibly have committed to demand so severe an expiation: what he had thought and felt during those long years of solitude, and what had been his sentiments when at last death, the only visitor to whom an entrance could not be denied, came and seated himself beside his couch, and called him by the name forgotten amongst men. All these, and many other questions, had pressed on Arthur's spirit whenever he had sought alone his favourite haunt; and sometimes he meditated so long, and lost so completely the sense of things present, that at the slightest rustling of the ivy growing in the clefts of the tower, he would turn round expecting to see the knight standing behind him.

But to-day such visions were chased by more lively interest. Arthur was impatient to teach his friends a diversion, of which the charm was quite different from that of the legend, it is true, but very great nevertheless.

On one side of the tower, and resting against it, was a sort of narrow circular terrace, surrounded by a battlemented wall breast-high. This little platform which once formed part of this singular building, was nearly as high as the second floor. It could be reached by the inner staircase, of which the last step stopped rather short of its elevation, but with a little dexterity and courage, it was easy to descend again on the exterior of the opposite side, resting the foot on the projecting stones, and clinging for support to the little shrubs which grew in great abundance in the crevices of the rock. Arthur, who was naturally very active, highly appreciated this exercise. He proposed to his new friends that they should try who could descend the quickest, and make the fewest possible deviations from the perpendicular. One of them was to look on, and decide upon the respective merits of the three candidates, whilst Clémence and Isabelle wove garlands of flowers and ivy with which to crown the conqueror.

"I will be judge," said Jérôme.

"All right," replied Arthur; "I really must go the first time. Afterwards I will take my part in the drudgery, for I must do you the honors of my tower."

Jérôme seated himself on a stone in the centre of the platform.

"You cannot possibly see us from there," cried Robert; "stand on the wall, you will find it much better."

"I shall see you very well from here."

"It is not possible; unless you lean quite over the edge, you will not see which of us gets down the quickest." But Jérôme was immovable, and Robert, finding that the others were about to take the lead, rushed after them.

The three boys soon returned from their perilous expedition without other accident than a few rents, and a few scratches.

"Now, Jérôme, it is your turn;" cried Arthur, rather elated at the advantage practice had given him over the new comers.

"Yes, yes, Jérôme, it is your turn," said his cousins; "show us now what you can do."

The poor boy remained where he was, quite motionless, turning now very red, now pale.

"What can be the matter with him?" exclaimed Robert, who could not believe that he was afraid of what he had found so easy.

"I dare not descend by the wall," said Jérôme, who made a wonderful display of courage in thus confessing his cowardice.

"Oh! the muff, the coward!" cried Robert; "he dares to say such a thing. I would take good care, if I were in his place, that nobody knew it."

"Well, then, we will leave him," said Arthur, rather disdainfully. "Let us start; this time I give you a minute's grace, and if you don't know how to profit by it, you will be very stupid."

Arrived at the foot of the tower, the boys called Jérôme.

"Come down, come down, valiant hero! Come and enjoy the honours you have merited, nimble Achilles! we are waiting to carry you in triumph."

For a moment there was no reply to these ironical appeals.

"Do not let us torment him any more," said Eugène, at last, showing more compassion than the others. "Come down, Jérôme; we are waiting for you to go back to the house."

Then they saw a very red and very flurried face amongst the thick shrubs which concealed the top of the tumble-down staircase. It advanced, then receded, then again advanced.

"Come, be quick," they shouted from below.

"You see, he is still afraid," said Robert, in a low voice.

"It is not possible!" cried Arthur. "Jérôme, why do you not come down?"

"I dare not; my head turns."

"Three cheers for our hero!" cried Robert, rushing up the staircase. He seized him by the arm, and compelled him to come down on all-fours, notwithstanding his terror.

Poor Jérôme! Stunned by the storm of jokes that had been poured upon him, he seated himself in a quiet, retired nook, and wept bitterly. Surely it was his old misfortune that had pursued him even here, and rendered this day, which ought to have been so happy, a day rife with poignant humiliation. The other children had not spared him; they had even

had the cruelty to weave a crown of leaves, and to place it on his head in mockery. It was the drop too much in his bitter cup. Slowly quitting the joyous but foolish little troop, he went to bury himself and his sorrows in the depths of the wood.

M. Hervé and M. Gérard joined the children soon afterwards. To their questions about Jérôme, four or five voices hastened to reply, and the accounts given shone more by their extreme volubility than by clearness of detail. M. Hervé had some trouble in obtaining a correct idea of the position of affairs. When he did at length clearly comprehend it, he told the children they had done very wrong to amuse themselves at poor Jérôme's expense. He had always been brought up in the city; and it was not, therefore, surprising that he should be awkward at bodily exercises, which more properly belonged to country-life; with a little encouragement he would, no doubt, be able to conquer the timidity which raillery and ridicule would render utterly insurmountable.

"Many men who have become celebrated for their bravery," continued M. Hervé, "were born with the most inconceivable weaknesses—natural cowardice, and shrinking—over which the strength of an indomitable will has triumphed. The only courage necessary, or, indeed, of any real intrinsic value, is moral courage, and by its aid all the other kinds can be acquired. I have known a man, who, in his childhood, had been made quite ill by the sight of a wound, and who had turned pale at the sight of a

few drops of blood. When he said he wished to be a surgeon, every body laughed at him. He was resolved, however; for he was sensible of a calling superior in strength to this instinctive repugnance. The hope of alleviating suffering, gave him the courage to confront it in his own person. He is become one of the best surgeons in the army; and although he still turns pale at the moment of performing an operation, his hand never trembles.

"Amongst those who have made a stepping-stone of their natural infirmities, to raise themselves to a degree of strength more real and far more worthy of admiration than if it had been innate, I may mention a name well-known to history,—that of Peter the Great, who was born with such an extreme terror of water, that he could not cross a bridge without almost fainting away. Any man of less energy of purpose would have accepted this infirmity as one accepts an illness; but he did not take that view of the case. It was this same Peter the Great, who, in order to form the Russian fleet, became himself a ship-builder, who repeatedly crossed the Northern seas, and who passed, in short, half his life upon that element to which he had such an innate, but not invincible, antipathy."

The children had gathered round M. Hervé. He spoke to them of many different kinds of courage, which are not necessarily found united;—that of the soldier on the battle-field; that of the sailor striving against the tempest; of the fireman or the labourer

struggling against raging flames, at even more imminent peril of his life; lastly, of that less striking courage, often ignored of men, which consists in the accomplishment of duty on all occasions, and under all circumstances, without regard to the consequences. "Do your duty, whatever may result, is a good motto," my children: "it is simple, yet far grander than appears at first sight. I hope you will each of you adopt it, and never allow yourselves to be induced by a cowardly fear of blame or punishment to deviate from the truth, or even to evade it by silence."

These words entered Eugène's conscience like a sharp sword. Oh, why had he given way first to disobedience, then to dissimulation? Why had he entered on that road where it is so much more easy to advance ten steps than to retrace one? And now it would be even more impossible than ever for him to confess his fault, for his father had stigmatised it as cowardice, and the very term made him quake with shame. A thought occurred to him,—could he not, like the Knight of the Tower, relieve his conscience by the infliction of some voluntary punishment, of which he only should possess the secret?

But something told him that the only real expiation was the humble avowal of his guilt, and this he shrunk from. When he had again become conscious of what was passing around him, he heard the others earnestly begging for a story.

"Oh, Papa, please do let us have one of your

stories! We are all so fond of them. You don't know how well papa tells a story, Arthur. Do, Papa, sit down on this little mound at the foot of the great chestnut, and we will place ourselves on the grass around you."

"I am willing," said M. Hervé, after a moment's thought, "at least if M. Gérard will kindly consent to explain the cause of my prolonged absence at the Castle: but I tell no stories unless Jérôme is amongst my auditory. Who will go and seek him?"

"I," said Isabelle. "I will soon bring him." In a few minutes the little group was complete, and the narrator commenced.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LITTLE CABIN BOY, A TRUE STORY.

Several years ago, the wife of a fisherman of Quiberon, was left a widow, with four little children. She did not lose her courage in view of her great responsibilities, which henceforth she must bear alone, nor did she give expression to her anguish by loud cries and lamentations. Her heart was broken, for she had been as happy as a wife may be, but she had not lost her energy. She re-commenced her labours the day after the interment, or rather she never ceased to work. Grief itself allows no respite to the poor. Death enters their houses, but brings repose only for its victim.

On the evening of this day of trial, the poor woman, seated alone near her little lamp, from time to time, looked at the vacant place; but she hastily dried her tears, that her sight might not be dimmed by them.

The four children slept, or at least she thought they did, for no sound was heard but that of their regular breathing, and the distinct monotonous murmur of the rising tide.

This voice of ocean, to which she had been accustomed from her infancy, harmonized well with the widow's thoughts. Whilst she listened she seemed to live the past over again. How often had she anxiously bent her ear to the sudden squalls, and to the agitated waves, whilst expecting her husband's return—and now she expected no one—had no one to feel anxious about! It seemed to her as if, until this moment, she had not felt what it was to be alone—quite alone—and for ever. Her heart failed her, and thinking on Him who bears our sorrows, she knelt and prayed. Whilst thus engaged, a little arm was passed around her neck, a child's head rested against her own, and Yvon, the eldest of her sons, not yet eleven years old, whispered—

"Mother, do not weep."

Yvon, unlike the other children, had not slept. He, too, had listened to the low rustling of the waves; he, too, was sad at heart, when thinking of the vacant place by the cottage hearth, and of the boat that must be sold, together with the nets, because he was still too little and too weak to make use of them. "Oh! why am I not tall and strong," said he to himself, "why can I not take my father's place, and provide for my mother, instead of her having to provide for me?"

The mother blessed her child, for he had comforted her, and sent him back to bed. She soon extinguished her lamp, and likewise sought the repose which was so much needed to fit her for the

duties of the morrow. But it was long before either slept. The mother dreamed of the past, the child of the future. At length, Yvon turned himself upon his couch, rested his head upon his folded arm, and fell asleep. He had formed a resolution.

On the following day, he paid a visit to the captain of a small merchant vessel, with whom his father had been on friendly terms. He knew that the schooner "La Reprise" was to set sail in a few days, and he wished to ask the captain to take him on board as cabin-boy. His request was at once granted. Yvon was quick, hardy, and accustomed to the sea, as, indeed, fishermen's children mostly are. That it was an honest lad you might see at a glance, as he looked at you with his great brown eyes. The affair was soon settled then, and the permission of his mother was all that was wanting to complete the bargain.

This permission was less difficult to gain than might have been supposed. Sailor's and fishermen's wives looked upon their children as vowed to the service from their infancy. Accustomed to a life of hardship, and to all kinds of suffering, one additional trial does not frighten them. Nothing strengthens the soul more than continual contact with danger, especially of that which, whilst it calls into action all that he has of energy, leaves man bowed in the presence of Him who can alone command the raging winds, and say to the agitated

waves, "Peace, be still!" The life of a true sailor is a life of struggle and of prayer. It is a type of what the life of all men should be. We do not say that it is the case with all; but those who understand the true grandeur of their calling, derive from it a strength, which, simple as it is, and unknown even to themselves, becomes, in the hour of trial, absolute heroism.

If you question the inhabitants of seaports, they will tell you the tale of their dangers, their fatigues, their miseries, and their misfortunes, in language so simple and earnest, and so entirely without the shadow of a complaint, that your hearts are touched by it.

So Yvon left his home, and was two years absent. The captain was kind to him, and the crew of the little vessel loved him. He sent all his earnings to his mother. They were but small, yet the little sum was a treasure in the eyes of the child, and in his mother's view more precious still.

It was the month of December. The sloop navigated the Mediterranean. It was one of those dismal nights on which the light of the stars cannot succeed in piercing the thickness of the fog.

During such nights as those, vessels often strike against each other in the open sea, as persons are apt to do in the dark narrow streets of a large city. Suddenly, the little vessel was shaken by a terrible concussion; a large brig had struck it in the darkness. The captain, not doubting for an

instant, that his sloop was about to founder and sink, with all she contained, rushed on board the brig which had caused his misfortune, and called on all his crew to follow him. The sailors obeyed without hesitation. The little cabin-boy, more alert than any, was about to follow in his turn, when he perceived a poor sick sailor, whom all had forgotten in the peril of the moment. What was to be done? The miserable man had not the strength to rise, nor Yvon to take him in his arms, but he had still less the selfish courage to leave him there alone.

So he stayed, and the brig departed, and was soon lost to him in the darkness.

Behold him there alone! alone upon the wide sea, in complete obscurity, with a poor sick sailor, who inquired why he had not left him to die. He thought of his poor widowed mother, whom he should never see again, and who had still so much need of him. But he would not despair; the day would soon dawn, and with it might come some means of safety. The wind was in the north, and drove the little vessel towards the coast of Spain, where, without doubt, she would be dashed to pieces against the rocks. The poor sailor, incapable of action, could yet direct the child, who executed all the manœuvres with activity and precision. But what could he do, alone and feeble as he was, to resist the power of the gale? He hoped that the brig would return, and not leave them to an end so terrible. But of this there was no question; the brig tranquilly pursued

her course to Marseilles. Night returned, a long night, without moon, without stars, without light-house, without hope. The poor child prays! He is very ignorant; but he knows that God is good—that He is powerful; that He can save. It is all that is needful to prevent his sinking into despair. On the morning of the second day three vessels passed, at a short distance from the sloop; but they either did not see or did not comprehend the signals of the little cabin-boy. When they had passed by, the sea seemed more sad and more deserted than ever.

Suddenly—oh what joy—the wind changed; it blew from the south. In a few hours, if well directed, the little vessel may be impelled towards the coast of France—enter one of its ports, and the two passengers be saved! Yes, if it is well directed, but who is there to direct it? A child cannot suffice for the labour which four or five vigorous experienced sailors could with difficulty accomplish!

But Yvon does not stand to deliberate. The old sailor has explained everything, and he has perfectly understood. He ran from yard to yard, and unfurled the sails which at first fell heavily, but were soon filled by the wind. At length they were all spread, like the wings of birds, and the light vessel began to glide away rapidly over the waves towards the coasts of France.

What a moment for Yvon! When he could speak it was to say, "O my mother!"—then he praised and thanked his God.

The invalid was so exhausted by anguish, and by the transition from fear to hope, that he had no strength to congratulate his young companion. Towards evening the pilots of the little seaport town of Agde, observed a vessel of which the rigging was in disorder, and the sides bore evidence of having sustained a rude shock. They soon perceived, to their astonishment, that the vessel was unmanned. The deck was deserted. A single boy, a cabin-boy, was there to suffice for all the manœuvres. A sailor reclining in a corner followed and directed his every movement. They were amazed, they hastened to the assistance of this slender crew,—and the child whom they questioned related all that had passed without appearing to suspect that he had done anything worthy of attention or approval.

Yvon had to present himself before a board of trade to make his report as captain *pro tem.* He did not utter a word of censure on the conduct of those who had abandoned him; he attributed to the sick sailor all the honour of the skilful management which had saved the vessel, and the testimonials of esteem and approbation, which were lavished on him on every side, seemed to touch his heart without exciting it to pride.

"And his mother?" asked several voices, when M. Hervé finally stopped.

"As you wish to know everything, I may tell you that although his mother still lives by the labour of her hands, she is no longer in misery—thanks to the

interest inspired by the generous conduct of her son. You can fancy how proud she is of her 'brave boy,' although she thought it quite natural that he should have done his duty."

"Is it true, then?" asked Isabelle.

"Quite true, my child. I read this story a few years ago in a newspaper, and have always meant to tell it you. Our little cabin-boy, who was placed at a marine school, is now not much older than you are."

"What! not older than we are? and yet he has already saved a man's life, to say nothing of his own!"

"Yes. We may be pretty sure that a child like that will, if God spares him, one day become a man, and France has need of men, my children."

"But, papa," said Robert, "do not all boys become men, when they grow up?"

"It is possible to be a man in stature without being one in character," replied M. Hervé. "You will understand that some day, my child, and will be a true man, I hope."

"I should like better to be a gentleman," said Jérôme, who had always heard a great distinction made at home between these two classes of individuals, men and gentlemen; and who was only aware, for his own part, that one wore a blouse or a mended coat, whilst the other figured in a new coat, accompanied by the indispensables of a beautiful neck-tie and a pair of shining leather boots.

This declaration was received with a burst of laughter, and poor Jérôme, without knowing why they were so amused, regretted having again drawn attention on himself. But his uncle, imposing silence, took the trouble to explain wherein his views were defective; and said, that, in wishing Robert might become a man, he had meant one whom straightforwardness of purpose, strength of will, and generosity of character, made worthy of the name.

"I intend to be a sailor," said Robert. "It is a fine life! Just the thing for the courageous. Yes, I intend to be a sailor, and an admiral."

"Gently, my boy. I have no objection to your becoming an admiral, but you must not believe that the beauty of life depends on this or on that external condition. Life is always beautiful if it is consecrated to duty. It is not necessary to be abandoned upon the ocean, like the little cabin-boy, in order to give evidence of courage and fidelity.

"A child who obeys the dictates of his conscience may daily perform some act of self-renunciation—nothing heroic or likely to gain for him great praise, but which will not be without its price in the eyes of that God who reads the heart. He who accustoms himself to be thus faithful in little things whilst he is a child, prepares himself to be faithful in greater things when he shall have become a man."

CHAPTER VIII.

A SAD CLOSE TO A HAPPY DAY.

Before the dinner-bell summoned the party to the Castle, the little people had become thoughtful and serious. It was quite dark when they left the table; for the days are short in September.

The stars were shining behind the chestnut trees in the park; and in so pure a sky that even the palest amongst them was distinctly visible. The groups of trees scattered here and there, had an appearance quite fantastic. Madame d'Ermance wrapped herself up in several shawls, and declared that, although the evening was a little cool, she would not deprive her guests of the pleasure of passing it in the open air. So they seated themselves before the drawing-room window.

On either side of the wide lawn, serpentine walks wound amidst the grass and flower-beds, and lost themselves in a little wood situated at about three minutes' distance from the Castle.

"I have a game to propose to you," said M. Gérard to the children. "It is that each of you, one after the other, should walk slowly round the

lawn, setting out from the right-hand side, passing through the little wood, and returning on the left. He who is longest absent will obtain the prize of courage.

"O yes, yes! that's delightful! It will be such fun," cried the children.

"I will go first," said Arthur.

"No, we will draw lots."

M. Gérard presented four pieces of grass of different lengths to the four little boys. Each took one. Robert's was the longest. He set off at a moderate pace; but they heard him quicken his steps as he entered the wood, and when he reappeared in the walk on the left, he was running as if he had a legion of enemies at his heels. He fell on the garden-bench on which M. Gérard was sitting, completely out of breath.

That gentleman looked at his watch, and smiled.

"Four minutes," said he, "and even then I give you good measure. You will have the prize of celerity, but not that of courage, Mr. Admiral! Whatever can have induced you to run at this headlong speed without regard to your future dignities?"

Robert did not reply. He was evidently a little vexed; for he was more anxious than any of them to acquire a reputation for courage. Drawing aside his brother, who was about to follow him, he whispered in his ear:—

"When you reach the entrance to the little wood, look carefully as far as you can see on the right-hand."

But little reassured by this mysterious caution, Eugène set out, his heart beating violently. When he had passed the first clump of trees which separated him from the party assembled on the terrace, he lacked the courage to advance further. Making, however, a violent effort over himself, he entered a covered pathway, without looking to the right or left, then he stopped, hesitated, looked behind him. A slight crackling was heard amongst the branches. He could stand no more. With a loud cry, he turned back, and soon after fell helplessly into the seat he had left, where he was received with peals of laughter.

"Better and better," said M. Gérard. "Now it is your turn, Arthur, and afterwards it will be Jérôme's."

"Oh, Jérôme will, no doubt, ask to be excused."

"Why so? I excuse no one without good reason. Now, Arthur, gather up all your stock of mental energy."

Arthur went away, looking rather proud; but he lost a little of his assurance on seeing himself separated from all human beings by the entire width of the lawn, which seemed to have taken the most gigantic proportions, and by the clump of trees which threw their dark shadows over his path. On crossing the wood, he ran almost as fast as Robert had done; but when he approached the terrace, and could again distinguish the sound of voices, he slackened his speed, although his heart was beating violently.

"Five minutes and a half," said M. Gérard; "we are making progress. Now, Jérôme."

To every one's extreme astonishment, Jérôme made not the slightest objection, and slowly commenced his journey.

"Ah," said Arthur, laughing, "he walks like a senator, but wait till he is at the second turn of the path; then, I fancy, the senator will be changed into a hare."

They listened attentively for some indication of the transformation predicted by Arthur, but the sound of steps was always perfectly equal, until it lost itself in the distance. Five minutes were gone, and no Jérôme.

"No doubt he has fainted with fear at the foot of a tree," said Arthur.

"There he is!" cried Robert.

"No; it is only a branch shaken by the wind. What can have become of him?"

Five minutes more, and they heard the sound of footsteps. Jérôme at length appeared. He approached without seeming in the least elated by his triumph.

"I think there are some robbers in the kitchen-garden," said he, quietly, and in a low voice, to M. Gérard. "Is it not the kitchen-garden which is behind that wall down there?"

"Yes," said M. Gérard; "but what is your reason for thinking there are robbers there?"

"I heard some voices whispering together, and the sound of branches breaking amongst the espaliers,

I recollected what was said at breakfast this morning, and have no doubt whatever that the thieves are come back again."

At this moment, a loud noise was heard in the same direction as that indicated by Jérôme. Furious barkings, and cries of lamentation, mingled with the sound of an angry voice. The kitchen-garden, the wall of which ran along one side of the lawn, could only be entered by the inner court of the Castle. Every one arose quickly, and ran in that direction. It was such a beautiful evening that no one had thought of lighting the lamps. It was, therefore, in perfect darkness that they all assembled in the grand entrance.

"Here he is! here he is! the rogue, the thief, the little villain!" cried a voice, recognized by Madame d'Ermance as that of the old gardener. "We have taken him at last in the very act, though he did escape us twice. He thought it was too dark to see him, and hoped to escape again, and that my brave Vigilant would not be let loose; but when his sight plays a body false, he trusts to his ears, and mine were on the alert this time. Here he is, taken at last, the little vagabond, and we'll see if he's worth the cord to hang him with."

The old gardener, whose self-esteem had been severely troubled by the two blots that had fallen upon his reputation for vigilance, spoke so loud and with so much vehemence, that it was impossible to gain his ear.

"A light!" cried Madame d'Ermance, "we want a light. How is it nobody has thought of bringing us one?"

Whilst Benedict ran to find a lamp, one of the grooms brought the lanthorn he had used to look after the horses. Its feeble light illumined but a small part of the vast hall, but fell upon the features of the little boy, whom the old gardener held fast collared, and whom he shook roughly whilst he spoke. Every one was surprised on seeing the little robber's lovely face. He was fair and delicate, and his large eyes expressed shame and terror.

"Poor child!"

This was the common exclamation.

On recognising Julien whom he had fully expected to see, Eugène involuntarily drew back a few steps. He was afraid of what might happen, and would have liked the litttle boy not to see him.

"Oh," said Julien struggling, "do not squeeze me so tightly. Let me go. I will tell all. It was not for myself. I did not wish to steal."

"Likely enough! You will find that it is out of friendship that the little beggar has robbed us," said the old gardener, without relinquishing his hold; "but it's hard to swallow all the same."

"I should not be astonished if this little one has played the part of Bertrand with the roasted chestnuts," said M. Gérard; "listen to what he has to say in his own defence."

Julien raised his head on hearing these words, which seemed less cruel, and his eyes met those of Eugène, who was half hidden behind his father. He knew him at once.

"Ah," said he, "there is one who knows all about it; he can tell you if I say the truth."

"Who, then?" said M. Gérard, much astonished that amongst the persons present, there should be one to whom such an appeal could be addressed.

"He!" repeated Julien, pointing to Eugène, who felt ready to sink into the earth.

"How can that be?" asked M. Hervé, sternly. "Speak, Eugène! What connection is there between you and this child?'

Eugène did not answer.

"He was there when the others threatened to tell my father if I would not go with them to steal; he knows that I did not want to steal; but they forced me to. He heard it all."

"What did you hear? Speak, Eugène," repeated M. Hervé.

There was no longer any possibility of escape. Eugène felt his heart fail him in presence of all the looks of astonishment and curiosity that were fastened upon him. Alas! was it to earn such shame as this that he had so long concealed his fault and carried the load of a troubled conscience. In the midst of his distress a ray of joy crossed his mind. He was going to be freed from the burden which otherwise he would never have had the courage to

cast off. This thought encouraged him to speak; he felt it just that the cowardice which had prevented an open avowal to his father of his disobedience, and its consequences, should be punished by a public humiliation, and he began this explanation in a low but distinct voice.

M. Hervé listened to the end without interrupting him—then he told him to go and await him in the carriage, to which they would at once harness the horses. He then entered the drawing room with Madame d'Ermance.

"The poor child has been guilty of a very trifling fault," said she, more, no doubt, from politeness than from conviction. "I hope, sir, you will not punish him severely."

"Madame," replied M. Hervé, in a grave, sorrowful tone, "it is the first time that my son has told a lie, and that he has been guilty of a base action. I cannot consider it as a slight fault."

"We bid you adieu, thanking you for this day, the sad ending of which will not efface the remembrance of the pleasures we have enjoyed. By your permission, I will take with me the little boy whom your old gardener would gladly see in the hands of justice. It will be better to deliver him to his father, who, to judge from what little I have seen of him, will not err on the side of mercy. Their house is not far out of our road. I will try to make him understand that the child is less guilty than might appear, since he has been led on, and, indeed, constrained to do

wrong by two boys, older and stronger than himself."

Thereupon they parted sorrowfully, and M. Hervé entered the carriage with Julien, who sighed heavily, and four of the children; Robert climbing into his favourite seat by the driver.

CHAPTER IX.

A NIGHT SCENE.

M. Hervé had desired the coachman to stop at a little distance from the Sapinière. He alighted there with Eugène and Julien, and told the others they must wait for him.

It was not very late, for the recent events of the evening had passed quickly; yet there was no light in the gloomy-looking house, and they had to find the door by feeling. M. Hervé was obliged to knock many times; at length a noise was heard in the house, and a voice exclaimed—

"What do you want?"

"I am M. Hervé, and am bringing back your son," replied the nocturnal visitor.

"My son!" was the answer, and the door quickly opened.

The little lamp held by Guillaumin shook in his trembling hand as he sought to obtain a glance at the countenance of his three guests. He was very pale, and appeared to control some strong emotion. When he had recognized Julien's dismal countenance,—he was hanging down his head—he ap-

peared sadly surprised, as if he had expected something else; but, without saying a word, he seized the child by the arm, and thrust him into the house; then turning towards M. Hervé—

"I do not ask any explanation, sir. The return of my son at this late hour when I believed him to be fast asleep, is of itself sufficient. I thank you for having brought him back to me. Pardon me if I receive you badly. There are moments in a man's life, when he has not the heart to be polite."

And he prepared to shut the door, but this M. Hervé prevented.

"No, you do not know all you ought to know. Let me tell you. Your unhappy son was taken at the castle d'Ermance robbing the espaliers."

"Thief!" said the father, with an expression of anguish, and as if the word had escaped his lips in spite of himself—"I suspected so."

"He has been led on by some good-for-nothing fellows, older and stronger than himself, who have constrained and intimidated him, and then left him alone in the moment of danger. He is young; he may repent and return to the right way, if terror does not destroy all his force of character. Have pity on him. Be merciful to your child!"

M. Hervé had drawn Guillaumin aside, so that their conversation might not be overheard by Julien, who seemed stupified by fear. Eugène was trembling from head to foot.

"I know what I have to do, sir," said Guillaumin.

"I ask advice of no one; and nobody has a right to proffer it."

"Still I beg of you, have mercy; remember how merciful God is to us. It is by love he breaks the hearts of sinners, not by anger."

"Enough, sir. I thank you again for the service you have rendered me; as for your advice, I have already said it was not asked."

The door closed with these words. M. Hervé and Eugène were alone in the darkness. They listened for a moment but heard nothing, excepting voices speaking very low.

M. Hervé then took Eugène's hand, and walked quickly away. When they reached the turning of the little path which led from the Sapinière to the high road, a long piercing cry was heard—Eugène nestled closer to his father.

"Oh papa! he has killed him!"

"No, my boy, no, the man is severe and unmerciful, but he is not wicked. I will see him again to-morrow. May God have pity on these poor people! There is nothing so cruel as to see one's child engaged in a course of infamy—and so young."

"Oh papa! when I think—"

Eugène's sentence was finished by a sigh.

"I understand, my child. Yes, with a little more courage, you might have prevented this boy's becoming a thief. You ought to bear your part of his fault, and of his shame."

"And I too, papa—I have had a lie upon my

conscience for many days. Oh if you knew how unhappy it has made me! To-day, and also during our shooting excursion I managed to amuse myself—to forget, but the misery soon returned again, and I was only gay while I could stifle it. Oh, I do hope I shall never tell another lie all my life long."

"You have given yourself a lesson, my child; now you know how necessary it is to watch and pray lest you fall into temptation. Come into my study before you go to bed. I have something further to say to you,"

"Poor Julien," thought Eugène, "if his father had been like mine, most likely he would not have deceived him. How could I deceive him?"

Madame Hervé was still in the drawing room when they reached home. She addressed a few questions to the children respecting the pleasures of the day; but soon perceiving that Eugène had not his usual happy expression, she embraced the others, recommended them to go quickly to bed, and detained Eugène by her side.

Eugène knelt down by the sofa, rested his head upon her shoulder, and whispered—

"Mamma, I have been deceiving you for several days."

"Eugène!" exclaimed Madame Hervé, greatly agitated, "my child, is it possible! I had such merit trust in you!"

"Oh forgive me, mamma, I have been so unhappy."

And he told her all. His mother listened in silence, then placing her hand upon his head, she said—

"My poor child!"

A tear fell on the little boy's forehead.

No reproach, however severe, could have had such an effect upon him, as had that drop from his mother's eye. On quitting her, he went to his father in the study, who explained to him how much worse his conduct had been, because of the great confidence that was reposed in him.

"I had hoped your lips would always remain free from lying, and your heart from deceit," added M. Hervé. "It can be so no longer. But, may God, who knows how to bring good out of evil, permit that this fault may be a salutary humiliation for you. You see that sin is at the door, and that we cannot keep ourselves—for we fall even before we are conscious of the danger. May this, your first experience of the bitterness of sin, cause you to cling very closely, my child, to Him who has alone known it in its full intensity, having emptied the cup to the very dregs, and yet He was Himself pure and without spot. Pray to Him, love Him. He loved you upon the cross. He suffered, that your sins might be forgiven you."

Eugène was overcome by his father's words. Often had he heard before of the Saviour's love, but not with the same feelings. Now that his fall had humbled him, his indifference was overcome.

The suffering and the love of Christ seemed now living realities, an dpenetrated to his very soul. Eugène's heart was touched, and very sincere was the resolution which he formed in that moment, that he would never again pass a single day without prayer. The father and child knelt together, a simple but earnest petition was offered—then Eugène embraced his father and retired to rest.

During this time a very different scene had been enacting at the Sapinière. Guillaumin had scarcely waited until the strangers were out of hearing, before he turned towards Julien, who stood trembling before him, but whom he had till then not even looked at.

"Miserable liar! miserable thief! shame of thy father!" said he, in a low measured tone, which resembled the rumbling of distant thunder.

Then he fastened him securely upon the oaken table in the middle of the kitchen, and, taking his horse-whip, began to flog him severely—but though his hand showed no pity, anger did not make it tremble. Julien screamed fearfully. His poor mother, who had heard everything, and who could not but acknowledge that her own weakness was much to be blamed as the cause of the child's faults, knowing how useless it would be to try to avert the impending storm, at first attempted by covering her head with the bed-clothes, to shut from her ears the cries that pierced her to the heart; but they reached

her still, and almost beside herself, agony having triumphed over the fear with which her husband inspired her, she slipped out of bed and appeared standing, pale as death, at the opened door.

"Enough! enough!" cried she. "I can bear it no longer. Do you wish to kill your child?"

"He won't die of it;" replied Guillaumin. "But it would be much better for him to die now, than to live a life of shame and crime."

And he again raised his arm to strike, but his wife rushed upon him and prevented its descent.

Then he turned, with so severe an air, that she retreated in terror.

"Get thee behind me!" said he. "Is it not you, his mother, who are ruining this child by your weakness, and by your lies. You will have to answer for this soul before God. Let me, at least, try to save him, if there be yet time. It is enough that you have ruined one of my sons—my first-born—he whom I loved as the apple of my eye."

On pronouncing these last words, which would come, although he tried to keep them back, this man, who looked so strong and hard, was seized with such a violent trembling, that he let fall his whip, and was obliged to seat himself.

Julien screamed no longer. After a moment's silence, broken only by the groans of the child, and the half-stifled sobs of his mother, Guillaumin arose, unfastened the poor boy, and carried him, without a word, into a room which was usually unoccupied,

where he placed him on an old mattrass, the only piece of furniture there was; locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and went down stairs. His wife had again sought her couch. Guillaumin opened the house-door and closed it after him, then he walked with rapid steps into the silent country, over which the peaceful moon shed her gentle light, as she slowly rose in the pure heavens, and seemed to regard her sister earth with the tenderness and compassion of a celestial being, mourning over a troubled, agitated, and guilty one.

What said the silence and peace of night to this hard proud heart—severe for himself, it is true, but so little compassionate towards others? What could they say to him? If he could have understood their language, they would have spoken of pardon and of mercy. But he understood it not, and, therefore, abandoned himself to those bitter memories which present griefs had so powerfully awakened.

What a difference between the feelings of irritation with which he thought of his guilty child, and those that filled the hearts of Eugène's parents, as they knelt together that very evening to ask of God pardon for their child, and strength to avoid transgression. The whole of this beautiful summer night, so gloriously bright above him, so dark within, was passed by Guillaumin in pacing with hurried tread the meadows around his dwelling. He looked haggard and worn when he entered it the next morning. He took his accustomed meal without addressing a

single word either to his wife or to Gaspard, who looked almost as wretched as himself. After having carried a piece of bread and a glass of water to the little prisoner, which he placed by his side without awakening him, he left the house with his elder son.

At an early hour, M. Hervé turned his steps towards the Sapinière. He was anxious to know what had passed there—the profound silence which reigned in the neighbourhood of the house, only half reassured him. The little blind girl busied herself in the kitchen, obeying the commands given by her mother in a voice scarcely audible, with her accustomed alacrity. Poor little thing! she looked even more sad than usual.

She had listened whilst in bed to the terrible wailings of the past night,—and to her in her two-fold darkness, the scene had borne an aspect of indescribable horror. M. Hervé apologized for his early visit with as much politeness as if he had been speaking to a lady, and said he came to enquire after the poor little fellow whom he had brought home last evening.

He spoke of him with so much interest, dwelling upon the circumstances which extenuated his fault, whilst not seeking to diminish its real enormity, that the mother felt constrained to open her heart to him: her poor oppressed, bruised, wounded heart!

"I know I am much more guilty than the child,"

said she. "I so much dreaded the consequences of his father's severity, that I have helped him to conceal his acts of disobedience. I never told a lie for myself; but I have done it for my boy. Gaspard was right in saying it was my weakness that had ruined him—and now it is too late to blot out, to repair—the evil is done; I have been the ruin of my child!"

"Do not say so," said M. Hervé, "it is not too late, and your child is not yet lost to you. Turn towards Him who can repair the evil—towards Jesus Christ, for whom it is never too late!"

The poor woman wept; but without appearing to find either hope or consolation.

M. Hervé was about to speak again when she interrupted him.

"Oh! it is because you do not know," said she, "you do not know all, or you would not speak to me in that way. Ah, sir! you look so kind; I think it would do me good to tell you everything, if you would listen. It is so very long since I spoke to anybody in the world of my poor Marcel—of my first-born! My husband will not allow any one to pronounce his name."

"What? Gaspard is not your eldest son!" said M. Hervé, who foresaw the probable explanation of all that had appeared so strange to him in the family of the Sapinière.

"No! would to God he were! and yet if you only knew how handsome and intelligent our Marcel was, how proud I was of him when he was a child. Ah,

sir! who could believe that these little creatures, which we receive as angels of the good God, could bring us so much misery!"

"Well, let me hear," said M. Hervé.

CHAPTER X.

THE HISTORY.

"My husband was not always so severe as he is now," said the poor woman; "but I have never known him other than the most conscientious and upright of men. For many years our life was a very happy one. Our children were talented, and the easy position we occupied permitted us to give them a good education. My husband was cashier in a mercantile house, and enjoyed the entire confidence of his employers. We had only one sorrow, our little Esther was born blind; but she was so sweet-tempered and amiable that no one could suppose her to be unhappy.

"It is true, Marcel, our eldest, gave us a little trouble; his father thought him giddy, and often said he had no just ideas of duty. For myself, I was less severe. He was so amiable, so affectionate, and always at the head of his class! My pride was flattered; I have been severely punished!

"My husband did not understand the easy disposition that was a perpetual snare. When he found that Marcel had done anything wrong, he

spoke to him so harshly that the boy was frightened, and did all he could to hide himself from his father. I have often seen him tremble on hearing his voice, or the sound of his approaching footsteps. This terror caused him to flee the house; he was only happy when he was away.

"One day — oh! never shall I forget that day on which I took my first fatal downward step—Marcel owned to me that he had fallen into debt, and said he dared not tell his father, he was so severe towards him. I gave him all the money I possessed, but made him promise not to look to me again. He not only did so, however, but acquired a habit of doing so. Every farthing that I could save from the housekeeping, or from my own personal expenses, was given to Marcel without the knowledge of his father. He had always some good reason by which to explain away my fears; and I did not think him capable of deceiving me."

"How could you imagine that your son, habitually accustomed to deceive his father, should hesitate to deceive you also whenever it answered his purpose?" asked M. Hervé.

"Yes, that is true, I understand it now; but I was blinded by my tenderness. And when one has made one false step, it is so difficult to go back. Well, sir, I approach the most terrible part of our history. For several days, Marcel, who had attained his eighteenth year, struck me as being sad and harassed. I asked him many times to tell me what

was the matter, but he said I could do nothing in it, and begged I would leave him alone. Then the moment after having repulsed me thus rudely, he threw his arm round me, and murmured, 'Poor mother!' I was certain that something lay heavy on his heart, but could not win his confidence.

"One night I could not sleep;—suddenly I heard a sound as if of some one walking quietly and cautiously in the room above, where Marcel slept. I arose without making the slightest noise, lighted my lamp, and met Marcel on the staircase. He looked troubled, and even more annoyed than troubled, on seeing me, and reproached me with watching him.

"'Is it thus you speak of a mother's anxious solicitude for her child, Marcel?'

He seemed sorry.

"'Go back, mother,' said he, 'my father will notice your absence. I am not going to do anything wrong, only to amuse myself a little. Young people must have a little pleasure. My father is so severe; if he were not so, I would not deceive him.'

"'Where are you going?' I demanded with increased earnestness.

"'To the house of one of my friends. I assure you we are not going to do anything wrong; but you must let me go.'

"In vain I begged him to relinquish his project. I heard him descend, open the street door, of which he had procured a second key, and close it. A heavy

weight had fallen on my heart. I crept back to bed; but my husband was awake, and asked me why I had risen.

"'I thought I heard a noise in the children's room.'

"'Well, is anything the matter,' he enquired anxiously.

"'No, no,' I replied quickly, fearing he would go up to see for himself, 'everything is quiet, and they are sound asleep; it would be a pity to awaken them.'

"As to myself I could not sleep until towards morning—now I reproached myself with weakness and culpability in thus aiding my son to deceive his father—now I accused solely the exaggerated severity of my husband.

"It was not the last time that Marcel left the house when his father believed him to be asleep. I always heard him; but took good care to keep out of the way, thinking it best to ignore what I could neither approve nor prevent. So things went on for six months. Marcel had not asked me for money for some time, and I tried to force myself to believe, that he only amused himself in an honest way, when he left the house; and yet something continually whispered to me that it was not so.

"One evening my husband brought home a large sum of money. He was, as I have told you, cashier in a mercantile house, and his patron had asked him to settle an account early next morning, before he

returned to the counting-house. We believed that no one had seen him deposit the money in his secretaire. When he sought it there next morning, it had entirely disappeared.

" My husband at first suspected the servant, who had not been long with us, and with whom we were not quite satisfied.

" Another thought, — a terrible suspicion, passed through my mind, — but nothing in the world would have tempted me to speak of it. The servant was soon cleared. Then my husband paced the room with a look of anguish,

" ' Anna,' said he, turning towards me suddenly, with a voice that made me shudder, ' if you suspect anybody, say so !'

" I felt myself become pale as death. I tried to answer, but had no voice ; at last I said :—

" ' No one, no one in the world, but it will be better to replace the money than to draw attention to an affair, that we may never be able to explain.'

" Then, for the first time, he looked upon me with suspicion ; he has often done so since.

" ' If you know anything, say so,' he repeated.

" I replied that I knew nothing ; and it was true ! After a pause, he said deliberately :—

" ' Well then, I suspect Marcel.'

" It was impossible for me to defend the lad ; I did more than suspect him ; although I had no proof of his guilt, I was certain it was he.

" ' Where is he ?' asked my husband, ' go and fetch him.'

"I went up to Marcel's room, he had just come in,—it had rained heavily, he was wet through, and his boots were covered with mud. He was very pale, and his hair was all in disorder.

"I told him his father wished to speak to him. He understood it all, and looked me in the face,—despair was written in his eye and it terrified me.

"'I have been gambling, and have lost all! If I had gained, I should have replaced the money in the desk, and my father would never have known anything about it. I should have paid my debts, and renounced a way of life that I detest. I should have passed for an honest man. Now it is too late! I am ruined, dishonoured, condemned to a life of shame and wickedness, if my father will not save me from it,—will he?'

"I implored him not to lose all hope. I told him that perhaps his father would replace the money, that he should work hard, and repay it to him; that he could still lead an honest life. He shook his head.

"'You do not know him,' said he. 'I will go, yes, I will go; But I have no hope that he will have pity upon me!'

"He went down stairs with unsteady steps, and entered his father's study.

"My husband, who was still pacing the room, stopped short: he thought he was come to deny his guilt. But Marcel said with half stifled voice:—

"'Father, it was I who took the money. I knew

it was not yours; but I hoped to be able to replace it this morning in your desk. I have lost it!'

"'And you are nothing more nor less than a thief,' said my husband, whose anger was aroused by what he considered mere bravado. 'Get out of my house, and let me never see you again. It is enough that you should have dishonoured a name hitherto unblemished.'

"'Father, will you ruin me for ever?' asked the poor boy in anguish that went to my heart, 'will you have no pity?'

"'No, no pity for a thief! shame to whom shame belongs, contempt to whom contempt. Get out of my sight, I say! You are no longer my son!'

"'Father,' said Marcel; and this time with an energy and power that surprised me, 'you may call me your son no longer; but God will none the less call you to account for what you have omitted to do to keep me from sin, and for what you are now doing to cause me to sink into it without remedy!'

"And he went out. I have never seen him since. For a moment I thought his father was going to call him back; but it was only an involuntary emotion that he soon overcame, and he forbade me to follow him. I begged him to take my marriage portion, which, although small, would have been amply sufficient.

"I told him that a father ought not to abandon his child to a life of shame and misery, for a first

fault, of which he had not understood all the consequences; because he felt sure he should be able to restore the money even before it had been missed. It was of no use. My husband went to his employer, told him in a few words what had passed, restored the entire sum, by means of the dowry he would not appropriate to save his son,—tendered his resignation of the post which was our only resource; and when he had done all that, he hastily realized a little money by the sale of our furniture and valuables, and we left the place with the rest of our children. I afterwards learnt that his employer had offered never to divulge the secret, saying that a first fault was not irreparable, and that it was a duty to give the offender a chance of recovering himself. My husband refused all compromise, and replied by the words which he seemed to take a bitter pleasure in repeating: 'Shame to whom shame belongs.'

"Two years have passed since then, sir. We have wandered from place to place, without settling down anywhere; it is a few weeks since our arrival in this spot. I have been ill ever since our great misfortune. I do not know what has become of my child. I have lost my husband's confidence. I am afraid that Julien will follow in his brother's footsteps, and that his father will push him also to his ruin. I have no more strength: no, no more strength. It would be better both for me and for my family that God should take me to Himself. I ask Him to do so every day."

"That is a prayer entirely contrary to His will," said M. Hervé, rather severely, though he looked so kindly at the poor woman that she was not frightened. "As long as God leaves you with your family, you have a work to do for Him in it. Ask Him rather to teach you what your work is, and to enable you to do it. And then, believe me, you are wrong to regret the past. An indulgence which had quieted the conscience would have been utterly fatal; it would have ruined your son irretrievably, whilst God has most likely made use of the exceeding severity that was displayed towards him to withdraw his feet from the road to ruin. Have faith, faith in Him who is come to seek that which is lost. Do you pray to Him sometimes?"

"Alas! sir, it is long since I prayed. Sometimes, in my distress, I say, My God! My God! and I think He hears, but that is all."

"Do more; God hears you, you may be sure of it. Confide all your fears, your griefs, your weaknesses, to Him. Speak to him of this son for whom you can do nothing, and ask Him that if he is indeed lost to you, he may be found and saved by Jesus. Tell Him too of the poor child to whom his father's severity and your weakness may be equally fatal. And now that he has been arrested so early upon the downward course, do all that in you lies to prevent his returning to sin; and, above all, never on any account aid him, either by your words or by your silence, to deceive his father."

And as he could see that his words of encouragement had brought no ray of hope to the sad thin features of the poor woman, M. Hervé thought it best to ask One more powerful than he, to speak to, and to comfort her. He proposed to join with her in prayer for her children. When he had finished, her expression had altogether changed, and she thanked him earnestly, but made no remark.

"I have perhaps done wrong to tell you all that," she exclaimed, after a moment's silence, "but my heart was sore oppressed! I needed a little sympathy, and you are so good, sir. I do not regret having told you. It seems to me that I shall be less constantly pursued by the memory of that frightful scene, now that I have been able to relate it to some one."

M. Hervé assured her that at any rate her secret should be faithfully kept, and that she should have no reason to regret having confided it to him.

He went away, reflecting deeply on what he had just heard. It surprised him, that this woman, who felt so strongly, who loved her children so tenderly, and who seemed to understand all the evil that her weakness had produced, and might still produce,—should not have had the strength, after the first terrible lesson that she had received, entirely to renounce all dissimulation for ever.

But he remembered that she had not sought assistance from Him who alone can give it, and was surprised no longer.

CHAPTER XI.

LAST HAPPY DAYS.

THERE was great joy in the house of the Professor. M. Gérard, who took a lively interest in Jean Paul, from having heard his father speak of his great talents, had formed a secret plan, of which he had not breathed a word to any one around him, which had succeeded more quickly than he had ventured to hope might be the case. Being very intimate with the distinguished man to whose care he proposed to confide Arthur, he had spoken to him of the Professor's son as a youth so studious, persevering, and gifted, that it was truly deplorable, not only on his own account, but also for the interests of science, that he was absolutely prevented from continuing his studies.

M. Bertin, for it was the same gentleman who had consented to receive Robert and Eugène, replied to this letter by a proposition which seemed to promise everything that could be desired. His establishment was about to be augmented by several fresh pupils; and his son, who assisted him, being no longer able to accomplish unaided the task devolving upon him, M. Bertin proposed that Jean

Paul, notwithstanding his extreme youthfulness, should take the oversight and hear the lessons of the youngest class; and he promised him, in return, not only his maintenance, but lessons in the dead languages, the use of the books necessary for the prosecution of his studies, and liberty to attend the lectures. Delighted with this unlooked-for success, M. Gérard hastened to inform M. Hermann of the proposition. It is easy to imagine how it was received. When Jean Paul clearly understood it, he turned pale, and could not say a word. Was it joy? Was it fear at the idea of his new responsibilities?

His mother, who was all in a flutter, and who scarcely knew whether there was more reason for rejoicing or sorrow, was annoyed at his silence, and feared that the gentleman who was so kind to them would be offended.

"Cannot you speak, then?" said she. "Have you no words to thank the gentleman?"

Then turning to M. Gérard—

"Excuse him, sir. These studious boys only know how to read: when they ought to speak, they are silent. Our Jean Paul has his heart in the right place, for all that; he is not ungrateful, I do assure you."

The large tears which rolled down the poor boy's cheeks, and which he clumsily brushed off with the back of his hand, as if ashamed they should be seen, spoke even more in his favour than the eulogy of his mother; and M. Gérard was quite disposed to content himself with these silent witnesses.

But as soon as he was gone, the quiet tears were changed to sobs, which shook the whole frame of this youth, ordinarily so calm.

"I shall be able to continue my studies," repeated he, with a choking voice, as he pressed his father's hand. "I shall have books! I shall attend the college course!"

"Let us thank God," said the professor, with much emotion. "He has done more for us than we have dared to ask."

When they arose from prayer every one was calm.

The mother embraced her son, and began to think of the little outfit that she must prepare for him. Julie offered her services as seamstress—the children went back to their interrupted games—Jean Paul to his books for the moment abandoned—and the father went out to give a lesson. His pupils remarked, that he had never seemed so joyous, though at the same time he had spoken to them more earnestly than usual.

As to Jean Paul, in a quarter of an hour he was as profoundly buried in his books as if nothing whatever had occurred; and when his mother insisted on taking his measure for some shirts, which she wished to cut out without loss of time, he found the interruption excessively inopportune, and could not understand why such vanities should tear him for a moment from his beloved ancients, whose togas and mantles seemed to him very preferable to the complicated bandages in which they wished to dress him. With that excessive simplicity that distinguishes

certain natures, he never thought of asking himself whether he could suffice for all that was required of him. Certainly the word *oversight* alone ought to have made him tremble; for he not only never took oversight of anybody, but had constant need to be looked after himself—he, who heard nothing and who saw nothing, save at the very last extremity. Yet he never gave it a thought, and when his mother, who thought of it for him, enquired how he should manage, he simply answered, he would do his best.

There were still three weeks before the departure for Paris—three weeks, which to the children seemed a whole existence, whilst the parents thought the hour they so dreaded, close at hand. It was resolved that there should be only just enough study to give a zest to the pleasures of liberty and country pastimes; and, moreover, that M. Bertin's four pupils elect, should meet together as often as possible, that they might become thoroughly acquainted, before being enrolled as members of the same family.

Madame Hervé once or twice asked, whether by rendering these last weeks so easy and agreeable, there was not some risk of making the sudden transition to serious occupation more difficult for the children.

But M. Hervé was of opinion that bright memories of home never enervate the will: that the boy most fond of fun and freedom is often he who works the most courageously, and bends his neck most submissively to the yoke. So they allowed these last

fine days of autumn to pass away, without requiring anything further of the young people at the White House than that they should be happy.

Jérôme himself began to expand, and a few gleams of animation and gladness lighted up his countenance. He was especially happy when he could remain quietly by his aunt's side, listening to the sound of her sweet voice, and receiving now and then a warm caress; yet even this was not unmixed happiness, for if he loved his aunt dearly, she did not cause him to forget his mother; and yet with the new sweet sentiment that he was loved, and with the clinging trust with which his aunt inspired him, there arose also a hope within his soul.

Why, if others could feel affection for him, should not his mother love him? Why should he not one day gain her heart?

Often when his aunt leaned over him at night, to bestow the kiss she was accustomed to impress on each little sleeper's brow, before she sought her pillow, he would half awake, and think it was his mother; and, on finding his mistake, sadness would mingle with the grateful affection, with which he returned the kiss that had caused him a momentary delusion. Poor Jérôme! Was it well for him to have such a loving heart enveloped in so unattractive an exterior? And yet, as it is better to love than to be loved, he had, after all, the better part.

Madame Hervé had quickly penetrated into Jérôme's character. She discovered that the only power—

affection—able to arouse to activity that which was good and noble, had never been employed, and that, if rightly directed, great things might be looked for as the result of his development.

Seeing that the first thing necessary was to raise him from that abject state to which the contempt with which he had been treated had reduced him, she commenced, not by praise or flattery, but by showing him esteem and confidence. Then, by degrees, she taught him to regard things from a higher point of view than that to which he had been accustomed. She showed him the beauty of truth, and the dignity conferred upon the soul, that never shrinks from the stern uncompromising duty it imposes. She explained that truth exists not only for the heart, but for the intellect, and must be earnestly sought after; and she showed him the necessity of conscientious effort, and the end to be gained by study. And then mentioning the defects which she knew to be his particular enemies, such as slowness, apathy, and certain physical weaknesses; she showed him how he might struggle against them, and by persevering effort, transform them little by little into entirely opposite qualities. Jérôme listened, understood, and entered upon a new existence; he even exaggerated his aunt's ideas, and ran into extremes. For instance, having resolved to conquer his greediness, and, what his cousins termed his love of ease; he slept several nights upon the floor, and ate nothing during many days, but soup and bread, his

drink being pure water from the spring. His aunt who had immediately divined the reason of this austerity, said nothing for some time; but at last, fearing lest his health which was not very strong, should suffer, she explained to him that all extremes are bad; and that it would be better for him to live like the rest of the world, and moderate the severity of his self-government, than to draw universal attention by his exaggerated privations.

Madame Hervé had succeeded in inspiring her children with a certain amount of consideration for their cousin, whom they had been rather tempted to look down upon. Eugène especially had learnt to love him tenderly, though even he patronized him a little. Clémence was quite repulsed by Jérôme's uncultivated manners; and, although Robert loved him very much because he was a good boy, he could rarely resist the temptation to make fun of his oddities, unless a glance from his mother acted as a reminder. It is true, that the remembrance of Jérôme's bravery, on that memorable evening at the castle, had somewhat modified his opinions of his cousin. If he was not courageous in open day, he certainly was at night-time. This merit could not be denied him. Robert was not a little humbled at having to yield the palm on this point, but he was loyal and generous, and did it honourably. Therefore, when they returned to the Château d'Ermance, no irritating allusion was made to the adventure at the tower. They knew too well that

Jérôme could have fought them with their own weapons; but the poor lad was slow of speech, and not much given to retort.

Now that Arthur had become more at home with his new friends, they were not long in discovering the less amiable phases of his character. If they played, he must decide upon and direct the game; if they took a walk, he must choose the direction, how far they should go, where they should rest; in fact, everything. He assumed the airs of a great gentleman; frequently informed them, that the castle, and everything they saw belonged to himself, and seemed to suppose that in this way he should inspire his little friends with the profoundest respect.

But his plan succeeded badly; and more than once he saw himself abandoned to weary rumination on his grandeur, whilst the others amused themselves to their heart's content on the very estate of which he was so proud. His young friends were not to be dazzled by the display of his importance, to which he had recourse whenever he thought them wanting in that degree of deference which he had been accustomed to receive from the little peasants and from Benedict. It would have been well for Arthur could he have found, amongst the village children who shared his sports, such a little peasant-boy as is described by a well-known writer of our day, in the charming history which he gives us of the events of his childhood.

"I led, strictly speaking, a peasant's life," says

Edgar Quinet. "With my little sickle I reaped my land. I was not allowed to carry away what I reaped, but only what I gleaned. Of these gleanings I made shocks that were all my own. I had a threshing-floor and a little flail. I sacked my corn and sent it to the mill, and oh! what joy it was when I received back the white flour. I kneaded it and baked my loaves in a little oven that I made of beautiful bricks, part of a hoop serving to fashion and support the roof. In this field-labour there was something more than mere amusement. I really worked, and so tired myself out, that I learnt to look upon the labour of others as a sacred thing. How sincerely I respected the furrow crowned with ears of rye, the beautiful meadow strewed over with flowers, and more especially the clown who returned homewards with his plough in the eventide; for my mother never lost an opportunity of inculcating a profound respect for human nature as seen in the sower, the labourer, the reaper, or the mower, to whose acquirements in their several particular callings, my own were so far inferior. Sometimes the result of her counsels went a little beyond her intentions, as in the following instance.

"My almost inseparable companion was a young rustic named Gustin, three or four years my senior, and much stronger. Notwithstanding this difference in age and strength, Gustin submitted to my will as if he had been born to do my bidding. This habit of command was prejudicial to me. I gave my

orders for the mere pleasure of seeing them obeyed. My mother resolved to nip this despotism in the bud. She summoned us both to her presence to receive—Gustin a lesson of pride, myself of equity. After having reprimanded me on my mania for rule, she told Gustin gravely that he was not born to obey all my whims; he was my equal, my friend, not my servant. She was determined to have no more of such nonsense.

"The barbarian was only too ready to obey her. As we left the wood next day, he felt fatigued, so he took off his sabots and ordered me to carry them.

"I was but four years old. I obeyed. We arrived in this way before my mother, I carrying Gustin's sabots with all humility, and they were by no means light. Gustin was quite proud at seeing me out of breath, and overdone with my burden; and yet he was the most honest and mild of all the village boys. Thus this first lesson in equity had not cured the evil, but only changed the tyrant."

But if the little rustic aristocrat was not to be found in the vicinity of the Château d'Ermance, his friends of the White House were not sparing of their lessons.

Only one week, and then would come the day of departure. The trunks of the young travellers had already arrived, bran span new, and with the name of each engraved upon a brass-plate. There they stood in a corner of the room like the monk's coffin, to remind them constantly that their happiness was

transitory, and that they would soon be called upon, not to die, but to depart. We confess there were several ways of looking at the question. Sometimes they were nearly heart-broken at the thought of so soon leaving all for a life of serious work, and then again they thought of the change that awaited them with the most joyous anticipations.

Where are the little birds that have not shaken their wings in triumph at the moment of leaving the nest, however soft and warm it may have been, thirsting with strange desire to launch into the vast unknown of promised wonders?

A last day was to be spent at the Castle. This time Madame Hervé, who could not bear to be separated for a single day from the children she was so soon to lose, promised to accompany them.

It was one of those delightful autumn days, which, although the charm of spring may be wanting, have a beauty that is peculiarly pleasing. The meadows of a greyish green, were covered with delicate lilac flowers, and mingled their softened tints with those far richer and more varied hues of the woods, with which they united at the foot of the mountain. The mountain peaks stood out with greater sharpness upon the pale blue sky, than had been the case in the hotter days of summer, when the air was less transparent. It was so beautiful, so calm and sweet, that even the children were less inclined than usual to laugh, and chat, and amuse themselves. As they were seated in the afternoon in a semicircle

on the grass, Clémence and Isabelle were surprised to catch Arthur in the act of tearing off the delicately variegated wings of a fly which had been silly enough to rest for a moment on a leaf beside him; he appeared thoroughly to enjoy his occupation.

"You are doing very wrong," said Clémence; "what possible pleasure can you find in it?"

"Oh, Arthur!" exclaimed the impetuous little Isabelle. "Naughty cruel boy! I detest you. Poor fly, it was so happy, and flew about so prettily, and now it is crippled for the rest of its life!"

"Any how, it won't be a very long one," said Arthur, laughing.

"Longer or shorter, the time was given it to enjoy."

Without caring in the least for these reprimands, Arthur continued to take off one after another the legs of the poor insect, whilst he looked at the little girls, with an air of bravado.

"Oh, it is too terrible!" cried Isabelle, hiding her face in her hands. "I won't let you do it, Arthur! Will no one prevent his causing all this suffering to a poor little creature that has done no harm to anybody?"

And she burst into tears. Arthur was quite astonished, and put down the fly. It twisted and turned itself about for a few moments, but soon discovering its utter helplessness, it ceased to move.

"It will be better to finish its torments," said Isabelle.

She stamped on the poor fly, and thus put an end to its misery. It had been so rejoicing in its life, but just before.

"I cannot understand what it signifies to you," said Arthur to Isabelle, who continued to weep. "You are not a fly. You don't even know if they feel."

"It is ridiculous to cry in this way, Isabelle; is it reasonable now to weep for a fly?" asked Clémence.

"I cannot bear that the poor little things should be hurt," said Isabelle. "God has forbidden it!"

"Where then? I do not know the commandment, thou shalt not kill flies."

"You may laugh if you like; but I am sure God hates cruelty. We ought to do to others as we would that they should do to us."

"Well, I declare, if that is not admirable! From this day forth, when any one asks me who is my neighbour, I shall reply—the flies! Miss Isabelle told me so."

Arthur spoke in such a droll manner, that everyone burst out laughing; even Isabelle joined, for she understood how to take a joke better than any of them. There was no resisting the charms of this joy which trod on the very heels of sorrow.

Arthur kissed her, and they all went off in quest of a new adventure.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ADVENTURE.

The meadows, refreshed by the moisture of the long September nights, were trodden by cows of slow and awkward gait, which, after cropping the short, unsavoury grass, ruminated on distant visions of trusses of hay, and a narrow dwelling-place, during the long winter months, with the most admirable supineness. And they were not alone in their carelessness as to the future. The four little boys who ran so joyously about the fields, throwing the green apples at each other, and now and then making large bites into them, just to try their flavour, troubled themselves but little about the dull house in the Quartier-Latin, where they were to pass the winter. The future was not either for the noisy, laughing children, or for the quiet cows,—they lived but in the present.

Isabelle and Clémence watched, at a safe distance, a most formidable assault. A little hillock had been put in a stage of siege, and was defended as a citadel. Its courageous little garrison, all their resources being exhausted, preferred to perish

bravely by the sword, rather than basely to surrender. After this horrible carnage, the dead on the field of battle, who might be estimated at two, arose again very quickly, their features bearing a striking resemblance to those of Arthur and Robert.

More and more in love with feats of knightly daring, the four little boys resolved to exhibit a tournament upon the lawn. The crowd of spectators being represented by the two little girls, who had wreathed a crown of laurel for the victor.

Our young heroes were at length fatigued with such like exploits, and conquerors, vanquished, killed, and spectators, all assembled together under an apple-tree, situated on a mound that had anciently formed part of the fortifications of the Château d'Ermance.

"What shall we do?—what shall we do?"

Mighty question, which presents itself continually to the infant mind.

"I vote for the water," exclaimed Arthur; "the river is only at about ten minutes' distance. I have my boat moored in the little hut, we will take it in turns to row, and we can go to the Abbey of St. Hugues."

Had Arthur forgotten, then, that he had been entirely forbidden ever to venture on the river without a grown-up person?—or did he suppose that six children equalled a grown-up man? Certain it is, he said nothing about the prohibition.

Enchanted by the prompt and unanimous consent

given to his proposal, he set off at full speed to the river, shouting "Come along!"

The little river ran between two rather low banks, which were however beautifully wooded, and between which it often wound in exquisitely graceful curves. When the little adventurers reached the boat-house, in which Arthur's light elegant vessel was moored, they ought to have known that their projected voyage was out of the question.

The sun was already nearing the horizon. His long oblique rays threw that mild and magic splendour over the country which is unknown save on autumnal evenings. At the foot of a little creek, the reeds, on which his rays fell, gleamed like pure gold. The willows which dipped into the quiet stream; the long rows of poplars on the other side of the narrow pathway; the windmill with its immoveable sails; the clouds which floated in feathery flakes upon the sky,—were all reflected in the transparent waters. Two pictures exactly similar were stretched before them; but the gentle ripple gave an additional charm to the reflection.

Clémence felt indeed some scruples as to the proposed expedition, and suggested that they should give it up; but the mere idea was met with such vehement expressions of dissent that she abandoned it, and took her place in the boat, into which the children jumped so energetically that they ran great risk of upsetting the fragile skiff, under the weight of such an unaccustomed cargo, even before quitting the port.

"Is it far off, this Abbey?" asked Robert of Arthur, by whose skilful manœuvres the boat was disengaged from the long grass, and eventually pushed into the stream.

"If we row hard, we shall be there in three-quarters of an hour."

And the boat glided so lightly, so rapidly, that it scarcely left a furrow in its track. All was mild, quiet, and beautiful. Before them the river was like liquid gold. It seemed as if they would lose themselves in light.

"What a good idea it was!" said one of the company. "It is such fun to go out in a boat quite alone—only six children. It is delightful!"

They arrived opposite the little bay that was to be the place of disembarkation. At a little distance, on a hill almost concealed from them by large trees and the fresh vegetation which clothed its old walls on every side, stood the Abbey, which was at this moment lighted by a last lingering ray of the sun, gilding its ruined turrets. An old woman was busy trying to collect some goats, which sorely tried her patience. Arthur, who marched in front of the party, advanced, and asked her if they could visit the Abbey? "Visit the Abbey at this hour! Upon my word you are not very particular, my little sir! I keep the key, to be sure, but I never open the gates when the sun has set, at least unless it is to some English gentlemen, who have a fancy to see the Abbey by moonlight, and who pay well for it. They are very

fond of moonlight those English are; and besides, they like doing things a little different from the rest of the world! No, no. You can't see the Abbey to-day, my children, so you had much better help me to collect my goats, who are sending me almost out of my wits this evening.

"Not I, indeed! What care I for your goats! Give me the key, I say, and if you don't choose to open the door, I will do it myself."

"You are not polite, young gentleman. I shall not give you the key; and as you will not help me, at least do not hinder me. It is time I prepared my husband's supper."

Whilst she spoke, she began to multiply the signals which should recall the wanderers home. Either the presence of the children excited them to insubordination, or it might be simply the spirit of contradiction natural to them; but certain it is, that the malicious, graceful little creatures showed that La Fontaine has not been unjust in accusing them of a certain spirit of liberty. They leaped and gambolled about, then came quietly, until the poor woman could nearly touch them, then again retreated to even a greater distance, just as tiresome, ill-bred children might have done.

The old dame, almost beside herself, screamed and scolded, now enticing, now threatening, and the naughty little spectators laughed with all their might at the comical scene. Poor children! they deserved punishment; and it was not long in coming.

At length the poor old lady succeeded in assembling the troop, by no means a large one. During this time, night had closed in, a really dark night, such as comes upon us with so little warning in the month of September. The children lost much of their gaiety in alarm. The dinner must be on the table at the Castle, which was at more than a league's distance. Arthur declared that it would be impossible to return by water, because the long grass might cause the boat to capsize. He knew the way very well by land, and would be leader.

Arthur spoke very confidently, but in reality he was not so sure of the way as he tried to make them believe.

They went a short distance through the fields.

"Wait a minute, that I may find out where we are," cried the guide of the little caravan. "There is the north—but no, that's the south; and yet, I think it must be the north, and then the Castle lies in this direction."

"That's satisfactory, at any rate," said Robert, "We may follow Arthur unhesitatingly; he will be sure to lead us to one or other of the four points of the compass."

By the dim uncertain light, the little party trotted on in silence, along a path bordered by hedges, and stretching out before them like a white ribbon with a dark border. Robert tried to get up a few jokes, but they did not take. Every one was looking forward to the probable consequences of the adventure.

Fatigue, the fear of losing their way, and the thought of the alarm of their friends at home, spoiled the charm of this nocturnal expedition, even for the most romantic spirits. Arthur felt himself oppressed by the weight of responsibility resting upon him. He was not at all sure of being in the right path. The night became more and more impenetrable. A few stars shone in the sky; but their light did not reach the poor dwellers upon earth. After having walked for half-an-hour, the children, worn out with anxiety rather than by the fatigues of their excursion, found themselves in the midst of an immense marshy field, in which they sank at each step as far as the ankle in mud.

"We have lost our way!" said a plaintive voice.

"No, no," cried Arthur, "follow me closely! I see the road down there."

"Do you think they will have saved us any dinner?" asked Jérôme, animated by this faint ray of hope, and allowing nature for once to have her way, although he had so resolutely determined to conquer her.

"My opinion," said Robert, "is, that there is something in store for us, that will take away all our appetite."

Several sighs were heard in reply to this very dismal prophecy.

The road that Arthur thought he had seen had disappeared. It was impossible to find it. The meadow was enclosed on all sides by an impassable

hedge, in which there were no gaps. The children went round it several times before they could find the spot where they had entered.

"It is incomprehensible!" cried Arthur, "it seems as if it were the work of magic."

Isabelle at once thought that the old woman to whom the goats belonged, was a fairy, and expressed this opinion.

"You do not know, then," said Robert, with great seriousness, "that there are enchanted meadows in our neighbourhood, in which one may be confined a whole night, without its being possible to get out. When morning comes, it is astonishing to find that there is nothing required but to walk straight forwards. It reminds me of the story of Matthew. I will tell it you; perhaps it may break the spell.

"Matthew, who was a peasant of St. Réal, went to a neighbouring fair, where his wife had charged him to buy her a couple of fine chickens for her hen-coop.

"She had given him the money that was necessary, and had recommended him not to drink too much, and not to stay away longer than was absolutely necessary.

"However, he did not return that night, and was found, the next morning, asleep in a ditch. When he had stretched himself well, and could understand where he was, his wife asked him after the

chickens and the money. He searched his pockets, looked all around, and seemed quite confounded at not finding anything.

"He said he was bewitched; and told how that the evening before, when he reached this little field, he had gone round it no less than twenty times, without finding the way out.

"To this day, the good man believes that he was the victim of a supernatural power. His wife, who knows that the money, and, consequently, the fowls, went over in the most natural way to the wine merchant, keeps him shorter than ever, it is said, since this occurrence."

Robert had hoped, by this anecdote, to revive the drooping courage of his companions; but no one spoke. It was resolved to make one more circuit of the field, when Jérôme exclaimed, in a voice of despair,—

"I have lost my shoe!"

"Well, then, look for it," said his cousin.

"I cannot find it; it is buried in the mud."

"Very well, then, leave it there, Jérôme; your namesake walked barefoot."

"What shall we do?" was now the general exclamation.

"Arthur, it is you who have got us into this scrape, and now you have made us lose our way."

"You were all delighted to go in the boat," said Arthur. "It was not my fault at all; and I beg you won't say it was."

Recriminations followed in quick succession, and they disputed in good earnest. It is just possible they would have come to blows, if it had been light enough. What a sad end to an amusement commenced by disobedience!

Feelings of discouragement triumphed in the end over those of anger; they said no more, for hope had vanished. Just then a long cry pierced the air. It came from some distance, and quite in the opposite direction from that chosen by the children.

"Listen! are they not calling us?" The cry was repeated; and Arthur, putting both hands to his mouth, answered it. A moving light was soon discovered a-far off.

Several persons, one of them carrying a lanthorn, approached.

"Here they are, here they are!" cried they, "and all safe and sound. Thank God!"

The poor little prodigals were received at the Castle as if no one had ever expected to see them again. Warm water was ready to bathe their tired, muddy feet, and they did so much honour to the supper, that their parents were somewhat re-assured as to the consequences of the expedition; but, by common consent, all moral reflections were reserved for the morrow.

Such was the last day passed at the Château d'Ermance. The last!—a word at all times full of sadness.

Would these six joyous children ever meet again? What would be their lot in the year just opening for some a new career? The future belongs to God. In order to face it without fear, we must leave it in His hands.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST EVENING AT HOME.

To-MORROW they must go! Sorrow had entered the pretty White House, usually so gay; and it seemed as if nature wished to associate herself with the grief of its inhabitants, for she wore one of her saddest garbs. The sky was overcast, and a dismal-sounding wind rustled amongst the yellow leaves on the lawn, no longer beautifully green. Hoping to drive away in some measure these melancholy feelings, a large fire had been kindled on the hearth. Madame Hervé was alone in the drawing-room, and much depressed; she asked herself how she could bear to be relieved from the daily burden of perpetual disquietude; the want of it, which as yet she had never known, seemed now revealed to her in all its bitterness.

She thought of the new temptations awaiting her children; and asked herself if they had within them those principles which would lead them to engage in a constant and resolute struggle against sin. All had been so easy for them thus far—their road so evident—and they had been supported and raised again when fallen, by kind and able hands. And

now would they still be surrounded by indulgence, affection, and solicitude? Who would undertake to reprove, without wounding them, to teach them to know themselves, without discouraging them? Would any speak to them of Him in whom alone is strength? Would they not forget Him; or, perhaps, the sense of loneliness might drive them closer to their Saviour, than either father or mother, with all their anxious solicitude, had been able to do? Oh! if it might be so, she would be happy, and could part from her darlings without fear.

All these thoughts united had combined to form a prayer, a silent, but intensely fervent prayer. Madame Hervé's eyes were closed, and she did not observe that the door had opened, and that some one had approached her.

When she looked up, her eyes met those of Jérôme, who regarded her with such an intensity of sadness, that she shuddered.

Poor child! she had forgotten him, and for him she had not prayed. She drew him towards her, and kissed him tenderly, as if she would repair the omission; he, alas! had so much need of an affectionate enlightened guide. He put a letter that he had just received into his aunt's hand.

"It is from mamma," said he, and he left the room.

The letter was cold and meaningless, as if Madame Lambert would not give herself the time to write. Jérôme had written to ask permission to return to

Lyons, for one or two days, before he went to Paris. She replied that it would be a great trouble and expense, and that it would be better to give up the idea. But not a single word of regret at not seeing him again! It was very clear that it was no mother's tenderness that addressed him thus.

Madame Hervé at once rose and went into Jérôme's room. He had thrown himself on his bed, and hidden his face upon the pillow, but he was weeping in a very great agony of grief. She drew him towards her, and pressed him a moment to her heart. The child was sensible of her love and tenderness which needed not to be expressed in words; and by degrees he became calmer.

"Oh, if mamma could but love me!" said he at last; he had said so often.

And Madame Hervé again repeated, that affection is not always expressed in the same manner: then she added, that he had not given his parents all the satisfaction they had a right to expect from him, and therefore it was but just, that he should bear his punishment; that no doubt when they had entire confidence in his desire to do right, and to profit by the education that they wished to bestow, they would show him more tenderness, and he ought always to endeavour by his conduct and improvement to show himself not unworthy of their love.

"Oh yes," said Jérôme with an ardour which strikingly contrasted with his habitual indifference; "yes, I will work very hard, I will make progress,

I will be the first in my class, I will carry off the prizes; and when mamma is no longer ashamed of me, perhaps she will love me!"

From this moment so entirely was he mastered by this idea, that he longed to be gone, and buried in his books. It seemed to him that nothing would be impossible to his efforts.

During this time, Robert, Eugène, Clémence, and the little Isabelle had been visiting together, under the pale autumn sky all their favourite haunts — the spots where they had played—where they had chatted together—where they had been so happy. There was the tree with knotted roots, where at least three of them had been able to read so comfortably, seated in niches formed by the twisted branches, their feet either suspended or resting on some lower bough. This was the little corner where they had seated themselves on the grass to bathe their feet in the stream flowing gently on its sandy bed; there were no large flint stones here to wound them. From that little nook the White House looked so beautiful, half hidden by the lime trees.

They passed the torrent,—by the plank to-day—all of them—they had no heart for gymnastics now. Up there on the other bank the little herdsmen had lighted a fire of dead wood and briars to warm them in the autumn fog, and to roast their potatoes. The cows seemed as idle as ever, only half awake; and the little boys felt inclined to envy them their vague dreamy existence, because they

could remain in the dear old haunts which seemed to them now more beautiful than ever. They approached the little shepherd boys who, knowing that they were going away, going to live in Paris, were seized with a certain respect for them and offered them half-cooked potatoes and chestnuts, which in the autumn wind had fallen like a shower upon the neighbouring hill.

Clémence and Isabelle said but little. Clémence was sad, in spite of her reason; and, if Isabelle had spoken, she would have burst into tears. So she held Robert's hand very tightly, and walked so close to his side, that he would more than once have complained that she was troublesome, if it had not been the last day. When they had seen everything,—the meadows, every corner of the garden, and the cottages where they were accustomed to visit—they again sought their mother. Yet, on reaching the terrace, a last sad lingering look was cast towards the ravines and the hills, the great shadowy trees, and the distant summits of the mountains.

"We shall come back in less than a year!" said Robert.

"A year!" exclaimed Isabelle, "Robert, will it ever come to an end—a year! And I never passed a whole day away from you!"

They entered the house, their hands still firmly clasped together. This last evening could not be a gay one, although every one tried not to give way to grief.

Before they separated on this last night, that was to be passed under the same roof, all knelt together at the throne of grace, and the father's prayer opened the sources of peace and confidence to every heart.

It was not only at the White House that sadness had entered. At the Château d'Ermance, in the professor's dwelling, hearts were heavy and eyes filled with tears that would not be restrained. Arthur was the only one who saw in his departure no cause for sadness; and it was rather for the relief of his conscience than for any other reason, that he came from time to time to embrace his grandmother, and to say to her:—

"Don't be sorry, dear grandmamma, I will write very often, and I promise you to work very hard at my lessons."

The great day was come; indeed nothing seemed to have separated it from the previous evening, so profoundly had the little travellers slept. Their mother did not tell them how she had lain awake counting the hours, the last that her children would spend near her. The hurry of departure, the beauty of the morning, which was in strong contrast with the sober dulness of the evening before, gave an impulse to the natural elasticity of their age, and completely changed the current of their thoughts. They received their mother's and sisters' loving embrace almost without feeling the anguish of separation. It was not so with those who stayed. For them, the

first hours of this interminable day dragged most heavily.

M. Gérard had engaged to conduct the four boys to Paris, and to place them under the care of his friend M. Bertin. They met him at the coach office with Arthur, who looked as brisk as possible in his handsome travelling costume.

Once upon the railroad, the rapid motion of the train having altogether dissipated any little shadow of sadness that the parting with his grandmamma might have occasioned, he exerted himself to the utmost to raise the spirits of his companions. Robert was soon laughing heartly at his satirical observations upon such of their fellow-travellers as occupied the same compartment. Certainly there was some cause for merriment. One of the corners of the carriage was occupied by a very fat old lady asleep, her double chin rested on her bosom, and at every blast of the shrill whistle, she jumped up, and looked about in the terror caused by this interruption of her peaceful slumbers. Opposite to her was a very thin young man, who seemed to be as hungry as his neighbour was sleepy, for wherever there was a refreshment room, he got a fresh stock of provisions. We must confess that our young people also, were not backward in availing themselves of the varied resources offered by modern civilization to craving appetites; and it was really wonderful how much more consolation they found in them than could have been expected.

Such is human nature, at least in the days of our childhood.

Towards evening the train finally stopped. "Paris! Paris!" This cry, death-dirge of vacations, fell heavily upon more than one young heart. The porters opened the doors with bustling noise. Our school boys descended quite stiff from long confinement, and felt bewildered by the crowds pressing towards the place of exit. When the luggage had been found, examined, and arranged upon two cabs, a new journey commenced; our little country people thought it would never end.

Streets, streets, nothing but streets! Some of them lonely and sad, others so blocked up that the carriage could move but very slowly onward, and the noise surpassed all description. But at last they left all this tumult and throng behind them, and entered a quiet melancholy district.

There were large houses with irregular windows, and high walls, behind which might be seen the summit of some lofty trees bearing unmistakeable evidence of the heat of summer, or of the clouds of dust which had not spared them as they passed.

The boys looked through the windows utterly disconcerted. This was not at all the Paris they had expected—Paris such as had been described to them, and as they had seen it represented in engravings, *that* they had only just realized for a moment on crossing the boulevards.

At length the carriage stopped in a large court at

the further end of which stood a rather tumbledown looking house of two stories, behind which arose the rounded tops of some large chestnut-trees.

Everything was old. The door steps looked worn out; grass grew in all parts of the court where there was no habitual pathway, as it does in the streets of some small deserted provincial towns. They ring—for there is no porter — an old servant opens the door, and takes down the boxes, which are placed in an immense entrance hall. One-half of a folding door opens with creaking noise; and the travellers are ushered into a large drawing-room, so dark that they cannot at first distinguish whether there is anyone there or not. A moment after, the same servant invited M. Gérard to follow him to M. Bertin's study; and the four boys are left alone, with the melancholy conviction that everything is very different from what they had expected it to be.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE APPARITION.

The four travellers went up to the large fire-place where, though the season was not very far advanced, a coal fire had been lighted, which was now dying out in the darkness. The straight-backed angular arm-chairs, covered by no means for the first time with faded tapestry, stood around like so many severe guardians. It was difficult to conceive that any one could have passed an agreeable moment in them. They looked more like instruments of unknown torture than like those luxurious articles of furniture which choice spirits in the days of Molière called *les commodités de la conversation.* So the children remained standing. They would as soon have dreamed of seating themselves in King Dagobert's easy chair, exhibited at the museum of the middle ages. The very high chimney was ornamented by a tiny mirror clouded by innumerable fly-stains, by an old alabaster clock, representing Ceres armed with a golden sickle, and by two candlesticks as inelegant and ugly as possible. The large round table was covered by a cloth, the original green tint of which now hesitated

between black and yellow. The rest of the furniture was ranged along the wall with most desperate regularity. An arm chair, then a chair, an arm chair, then a chair again. They seemed to say, "Don't touch me, or you'll repent"; and they looked quite determined to offer all their corners to any one who should persist in trying to make the same use of them as of ordinary chairs and easy-chairs.

Long, green, narrow curtains fell, string-like, on each side of the three windows, one of which opening to the ground, communicated with the garden; some other small curtains, once white, now of a smoky grey, completed the attractions of the apartment.

We do not intend to insinuate that the children minutely observed each of these particulars; but it may be easily conceived, that the vague impression made upon their minds was not the most agreeable.

Arthur's eyes, accustomed to the elegant comfort of the Château d'Ermance, and those of Robert and Eugène to the exquisite grace which presided over all the household arrangements of their mother, were equally shocked at these appearances of negligence and decay. They looked out into the garden, by the half-opened door; and the glance they obtained of it was anything but calculated to put them in love with their new home. Was it a garden, that great square of faded withered grass, entirely gone in many places, the nakedness of which a few trees had done their best to hide by a plentiful shower of crisp and yellow leaves; those walks bordered by

shabby box, and the bare excrescence at the end, which seemed to represent a mountain?

Robert and Eugène's thoughts went back to the beds of flowers, and to the noble trees surrounding their much-loved home,—Arthur's to the park, the lawns, the old tower—and they were home-sick. Jérôme alone was unmoved; and when they remarked to him, how frightful the garden was, he replied:

"What does that matter? we are come to study."

Whilst the old furniture and the barren garden were thus bidding the new pupils welcome in their own manner; and, as they returned disconsolately into the drawing room, a door opened and a most unexpected sight offered itself to their astonished gaze. They would never have dreamed of seeing a little girl, or a young lady perhaps we ought to call her, for she seemed to be scarcely a child, and yet it was difficult to say exactly to which appellation she could most justly lay claim. Like those curious natural phenomena, which have not yet been scientifically classified, it is necessary to describe this singular apparition, in order to give a correct idea of her. It was, then, a great child, or a small young lady,—or, better still, a boy dressed in girl's clothing, whose hair was cut short, and to judge by its disorderly appearance, extremely averse to even occasional contact with brush and comb. A great black pinafore with long sleeves, fastened at the wrists, entirely covered her, and only left exposed the twisted tumble-down stockings, and the shoes that

had lost their ties. The features of this singular creature were not wanting in delicacy; but all the muscles of her pale thin face were in constant movement, and the fatigue occasioned by these repeated contractions, barely allowed the observer to perceive that the eyes, although not large, were quick, expressive, and of a soft brown colour. Sara, for we must acknowledge that it was a young lady of some fifteen or sixteen years of age, was an orphan niece adopted by M. Bertin. She had been subject, during her infancy, to a nervous affection, which she appeared to have out-grown; but it had left nervous twitchings, which were much more fatiguing to the beholder than to herself, for she seemed to be scarcely sensible of them.

All her movements were awkward, brusque, and unpleasing, as of a clock when it runs down. Instead of opening the door sufficiently to allow her to enter, she passed her head through a small crack, and said to the little boys:—

"Are not you the new pupils? How is it you came to-night instead of to-morrow morning?"

"Simply because we set off this morning instead of this evening," said Arthur.

"The other pupils will not be here before to-morrow morning; and we expected you would be the same, that is the reason you are so badly received. Perhaps you are cold? The fire is gone out, and the wind is in the north, and very high this evening."

This time the little nymph showed herself alto-

gether,—from the rough head to the ill-shod feet; she ran to the fire-place, seized the tongs and the coal scuttle, and in a few moments had lighted a fire, which was sadly wanted in this large dismal room, scarcely ever cheered by one pale sunbeam.

"I see, plainly," said she, when she had finished her work, "that our old house does not much please you. Have you heard that it is haunted? Are you frightened? You well may be, I assure you; for apparitions are sometimes malicious; they laugh at the new pupils, and have no greater pleasure than in tormenting them."

"Are there many?" asked Eugène, whose ready perception had shown him the bearing of the young lady's joke.

"Their name is Legion; but, as they always appear in the same form, one might be tempted to believe that there was only one, endowed with the gift of ubiquity."

"They say that apparitions are not beautiful," replied Eugène, with an expression that applied his words.

"Very ugly—even frightful," replied Sara, not in the least disconcerted.

"Do they not appear to you when you look in the glass"

"Exactly so. You show wonderful penetration."

Such was the conversation, when steps were suddenly heard in the vestibule. The door opened; but certainly they were no ghosts who entered. M. Gérard

was followed by a young man of slow and measured movements. He was rather stout and had almost the fair rosy complexion of a child, which formed rather an amusing contrast with the spectacles that sat upon his nose.

"What are you doing here, Sara?" said he; "you know this is not the place for you!"

Sara made an additional grimace, and disappeared without venturing a reply.

M. Gérard then presented the four new pupils to M. Prosper, son and assistant of M. Bertin. M. Prosper shook hands with each of them in the most solemn manner, and then tried to find something to say.

When he had found a question, and it had been duly replied to, he racked his brain for another, until he thought the conversation had been sufficiently prolonged for the first interview. M. Gérard having taken leave, with the promise that he would return to say adieu to-morrow, M. Prosper proposed that the young gentlemen should go to their own rooms.

The chambers that were appropriated to the pupils of M. Bertin, and occupied by two boys conjointly, were large and airy, but were furnished in the most simple manner. Each had his bed, his wardrobe, his writing table, and his jug and basin, on a small deal table—nothing more, nothing less. Arthur and Robert were to occupy one, Eugène and Jérôme another.

The discordant sounds of a broken bell were soon

heard, and the old servant came to inform them that it was the dinner bell. In spite of the visits paid to divers refreshment rooms, the news was well received.

M. Bertin, who was already aged and of venerable aspect, received, and spoke to them kindly.

"We are a family party to-day," said he, when they had seated themselves at the end of the table, which occupied the whole length of the dining-room, "so we can for once suspend the rules to which we are subject, and every one can talk as he likes."

"I think, father," said M. Prosper, with his sententious manner, "that it were wiser to observe the rules to-day, if you wish them to be observed to-morrow."

"And what do *you* think, my little fairy?" asked M. Bertin of Sara, who was seated by him.

"You know very well what I think, you naughty uncle," replied she; "but you want to draw me into some horrible profession of faith, which shall give my cousin the opportunity of extinguishing me utterly beneath the weight of his indignation; therefore, I shall hold my peace."

"If so many words are needed, young lady, when you do not reply, of how many should you be obliged to make use in answering my question?"

During the dinner, which was quickly over, the little war between the old Professor and his sprite continued; for she was never at a loss in repartee. It was easy to see that they were on the best of

terms, that they were thoroughly unanimous in sentiment, and, by mutual understanding, had formed a sort of merry plot to maintain the rights of liberty and freedom of speech, in opposition to the worship which poor Prosper had paid from his earliest years to propriety and rule.

The poor boy really suffered from things which gave the greatest pleasure to his father; and what he called the intolerable boorishness of his cousin, was so much the more intolerable to him, because he really loved her, and took care to prove it by a more than usually rigorous supervision.

M. Bertin himself would have been disposed to acknowledge, that when she attained the age of twenty, or even earlier, if possible, Sara would have to alter in a few particulars; but, in the meantime, he liked her just as she was, for he said she was like nobody else. A little abrupt himself, and a man of few words for the rest of the world, the tenderness of his expression towards her was almost maternal, but it was an expression of countenance merely, for he never voluntarily indulged in any other outward manifestation than a little fondling pat upon the head.

M. Bertin had lived for nearly half-a-century in an atmosphere of precision, reserve, and frigidity. The persons with whom he was most closely united were utterly unable to diffuse around them a warmth and life, which were wanting in themselves. When he suddenly welcomed to his

home a little, affectionate, gay, original creature, whose bright happy spirits betokened the entire absence of all depressing agency, it seemed to him as if the temperature of his life had changed; and he had passed from the frozen northern zone to the warm and sunny south. Sara was a very little child when her mother died, and having no other protector than her uncle, she attached herself to him with all her heart; and became, from the moment she was able to hold a pen, his amanuensis, his reader, and constant companion, excepting only the moments that he was obliged to devote to the duties of his class.

The state of her health gave rise to serious disquietude; but it improved every year. As to her mind, the Professor declared he had never known its superior.

During the greater part of each day, Sara was at work in her uncle's private study. No one exactly knew how she spent those long hours. It was, indeed, suspected that she pryed inquisitively into some of the old Greek and Latin authors.

Some people said, that the Professor taught her what he found too difficult for his other pupils. However, neither she nor her beloved master ever breathed a word of what passed between them, and some of the young scholars, who gloried in their prizes or their laurels, hardly won, would have been not a little humbled at learning that the singular little girl they used to laugh at could have surpassed them all in Greek translations and in Latin Exercises.

But if Sara was familiar with a great deal of the knowledge which makes men learned, she was miserably deficient in the usual and agreeable talents of women.

She never worked with her needle, and it was as much as ever she could do to sew on a button in case of need. Her wardrobe, which had been confided to the care of Madame Germain, a kind of housekeeper who directed the whole establishment, was in a most deplorable condition. When she outgrew her frocks, no one perceived it. No one told her that her collar was all awry, and that the body of her dress could not be made to hook behind. She had such a profound contempt for outward adornment, that she persisted in wearing her large black pinafores, and her hair cut short. No doubt, she was thereby preserved from sundry ink-spots, and the business of the toilette was the more easily despatched; but she lost thereby something of the charm natural to her age.

This poor sprite, then, with all her stores of knowledge, and all her good qualities, was not unfrequently the butt of the merry boys instructed by her uncle. He was well aware of it, but did not trouble himself about it the least in the world.

Sara was like the princess in the fairy tale, clothed in an ass's skin. The day would come when she should put on her beautiful light dress; in the meantime, she had a precious ring upon her finger, which dropping now and then into the cake she was kneading, would betray her to the enlightened. Her

actions had already more than once manifested the goodness and generosity of her character.

The four new pupils were by no means disposed to abuse the permission that had been granted them. Had it not been for Sara's animated conversation, and the liveliness she communicated to her uncle, their first meal at school would have been a sufficiently mournful one.

CHAPTER XV.

JEAN PAUL'S FIRST ATTEMPT.

JEAN PAUL arrived next morning, having travelled third class. The poor boy had been half frozen during the night. He wore a jacket which his mother had made from one of his father's old coats, a thin plaid of which she had deprived herself, in order to supply the want of a surtout, and woollen cuffs, his sister's present, which kept his wrists even warmer than the season rendered necessary, but only moderately compensated for the absence of other, more comfortable clothing. No one who had known what marvellous achievements his mother and sister had accomplished in the way of skill and economy, in order to prepare his miserable outfit, would have had the heart to smile on seeing this great boy, who had far outstripped his father, squeezed into his narrow jacket, the short sleeves of which persisted in rising continually half way towards the elbow, leaving visible the famous green and brown striped gauntlets. He was very sensible that he was not dressed like other youths of his age; and this persuasion tended greatly to increase his natural awkwardness; but he

could not have said in what the difference consisted; and it never occurred to him, that it might possibly operate to his disadvantage upon the minds of others.

M. Bertin was at once favourably impressed by the young man's sweet serious countenance. As to M. Prosper, he was shocked beyond all expression by the strange appearance and inelegant manners of his new companion. There was an important question to resolve. How was Jean Paul to be presented to the children, who were to be placed under his care, in such a manner as to inspire them with the necessary respect for him as their master?

There was certainly nothing in his appearance calculated to enforce it; and, if the little people commenced by laughing at, and turning him to ridicule, all would be over. There were eight boys in the class, of from nine to eleven years of age; they did not yet go to the Lycée, but were preparing to enter there. Jean Paul was to explain the *De viris* to them, and continue his own dear studies at the same time, under the direction of M. Bertin, who was a distinguished linguist. There was nothing to prevent his entering at once upon his new functions. M. Bertin introduced him into the lower class-room, where the turbulent little group was assembled, some of them still excited by the recently passed pleasures of the vacation;—others, new comers, quite astonished at everything they saw and heard at the entrance of their school life. There were only eight,

and yet from the terrible uproar, you would have thought there must be at least a dozen.

Jean Paul entered, hanging down his head, and looking as contrite as if he were being led before his judge, convicted of some heinous offence.

"What is to be done?" soliloquised M. Bertin. "He will never know how to do anything with children. He is too young, too timid, too awkward; they will do whatever they choose with him. However, we will not despair without a trial. It will be best to leave him quite alone, and let him get out of his difficulties as well as he can."

So he took Jean Paul by the hand and presented him to the little boys, who were already laughing and whispering to their heart's content about him.

"M. Hermann will be so kind as to take charge of you," said he, "and to overlook your studies whenever he is not occupied with his own. I hope you will not render his task too difficult."

Then having given a few directions for the employment of the next hour, he went out, and Jean Paul found himself alone in the midst of a little world of unpitying jokers. In this critical position, not even comprehending the full extent of the difficulties with which he would have to contend, his great simplicity of heart came to his aid.

He did not even perceive the smothered jokes bandied about at his expense by some of the little boys, who nudged each other's elbows, and pointed to the short sleeves and gauntlets.

At the upper end of the black table, by the side of the master, sat a pretty little boy, whose countenance contrasted with the bright but naughty-looking grimace-making visages of his comrades. It was to him that Jean Paul first addressed himself. He asked him to show him the place in the dictation-book where they had stopped at the beginning of the vacation.

The little boy hastened to show it to him, and began to write with great earnestness as soon as Jean Paul had dictated the first line, which began thus :— "Mentor," etc.

"That was a dog, was it not, sir," asked one of the little fellows, biting his pen, to avoid bursting into a laugh.

"No," said Jean Paul, "it was—"

"But it is the name of a dog—a singular name, Mentor. Ah, I beg your pardon, I meant Médor. I made a mistake. But, who was this Mentor?"

"Mentor was a man—"

"Oh yes, I know, a very amusing jolly old fellow, who was always making young Telegraph laugh."

A general burst of laughter was the result of this happy attempt at a joke; and Jean Paul, a little disconcerted, began to think the little folks would prove ungovernable.

"Silence!" said he, in as firm a tone as possible. "I will have no nonsense."

In a moment every head was bent over the desk with exaggerated gravity, and the pens began to

scratch upon the paper. But that could not last. The next minute the little rolling tide had again commenced its onward course, and the irresistible merriment was on every lip. So things continued for half an hour. It was unnecessary that Valentin should make any very great efforts to enliven his companions, they were easily worked upon and amused.

Once wound up, they seemed as if nothing could stop their merriment.

M. Prosper happened to come in for a book; and, in his distress, Jean Paul appealed to him for assistance; but M. Prosper had, from the first, taken such an aversion for the poor boy, that he contented himself by answering—

"It is your affair, not mine. I cannot interfere."

Then Jean Paul remembered having heard it said, or to have read somewhere, he could not remember which, that the intercourse of a professor with his pupils depends upon the first lesson, and the degree of influence he is able to acquire over them from the commencement. The thought quite frightened him. Perhaps it was even now too late. He was ready to burst into tears; but he knew that would only be, to put the crowning point to his misfortunes; and yet it cost him a violent effort to restrain himself. By a sudden inspiration, he did the only thing that was useful or reasonable in such a case. As Valentin opened his mouth again to utter one of the sallies which were so highly appreciated, Jean Paul took

him by the arm, led him to the door, opened it, and shut it upon him, then he resumed the dictation at the point where they had stopped as if nothing had happened; feeling quite astonished at the cool determination with which he had been able to accomplish this act of justice. The other boys looked at each other in surprise; they began to write, and did not venture to move, until the young professor, for whom they had begun to feel a certain degree of respect, asked for their copy books.

Valentin was in his way as Jean Paul left the class. He did not hang down his head, or look sorry, but regarded his master with an expression of cunning which promised nothing good. But the young man did not perceive it, and returned to his own room. On entering it, he felt very lonely—so lonely, that it seemed to him as if he could have gladly renounced all his hopes, to be once more at his own dear home. But he opened his trunk, and took out the books that he had brought with him, arranged them upon shelves which occupied a recess in the wall just above his writing table, and took comfort.

Whilst he was thus absorbed, some one knocked at the door; it was M. Prosper; his spectacles were on his nose, and he looked more ministerial than ever.

"Sir," said he, "you are doubtless ignorant of the rules and customs of such a school as ours. What has happened this morning is of very grave moment,

I do assure you. I can only excuse it on the grounds of your ignorance of the duties imposed by refinement."

"What has happened?" enquired Jean Paul, utterly confounded by this incomprehensible preface, and unable to imagine what could possibly follow it.

"Those are the words I used, Sir; but it may be as well to observe, that it is not usual, in polite society, to hear one's own expressions repeated. But to return to the fact to which I have already made some allusion: you must know, that a child confided to your care, is never to be struck."

"Struck! No child has been struck, at least not by me."

"Again!—but no matter—as it is your habit to repeat all that is said to you. You cannot, however, deny, that Valentin Duméril was dragged from his place with inconceivable violence,—dragged as far as the door, and then pushed out of the room, and by you, sir,—by yourself!"

"A little boy, whose name I do not know, behaved very badly, and, spite of all my remonstrances, excited the others to revolt. I took him by the arm, and put him outside the door. He had richly deserved it."

"You are pleased to say so; but the child's account differs widely from your own, sir, and I beg that another time you will make use of more suitable measures for securing your pupils' obedience."

M. Prosper went out of the room as he said these words. Jean Paul was confounded. For the first time in his life he had been disbelieved. For the first time unjustly accused,—he who had been treated with so much indulgence,—and that at a moment when his task had appeared so difficult, in the very moment of discouragement! It was hard, indeed.

But, to certain characters, the sense of injustice gives an unexpected strength; and the Professor's timid, inobstrusive son, was of this number. He resolved to go straight to the little boy who had told the lie, and force him to confess the truth before everyone.

So he went down into the class-room, where the children were preparing their lessons; went up to Valentin, and commanded him to accompany him to M. Bertin and M. Prosper. Valentin tried to resist, but both gentlemen entered the room at the identical moment.

"Sir," said Jean Paul, addressing M. Bertin, "this little boy is going to tell you all that has passed between us. He has been saying what is not true; his companions are now present. He shall tell you everything. I am quite ready to be blamed if I have done wrong."

Valentin would have liked to hide himself in the earth. He had not expected such a display of firmness in him whom he called "the poor pawn;" he had hoped, on the contrary, to be able to master

him. However, he thought it best to repeat the same version of the affair, that he had already given to M. Prosper, supposing that his companions would at least be silent, and not betray him.

"I complained," said he, "because I thought we ought not to be struck. I am sure my father would take me away at once if he knew I had been. As I told M. Prosper, this gentleman seized me by the arm with such violence, that I believed he had broken it, and threw me outside the door with such force that I fell down at full length; and all because I could not help laughing a little!"

A murmur of indignation passed from bench to bench as the boys listened to this story; but no one spoke, perhaps because they made it a point of honour not to betray a schoolfellow, perhaps because Valentin had made himself formidable by his naughtiness, and they did not wish to make him their enemy. The little boy whom Jean Paul had noticed for his sweet serious expression hesitated for a moment, like the rest, then he rose, and said,—

"It is not true!"

The assertion once made, all the others supported it.

"No, it is not true! It is infamous; it is shameful! He was not dragged violently; he was not pushed out of the door. He did nothing but make fun, and force us to laugh; he richly deserved it."

"That will do, my children," said M. Bertin, "you

are quite justified! As to you, Valentin, you have made a very bad beginning of the new year. You shall be sent to Coventry for the next eight days; and if you fall again into so grave a fault, I shall ask your father myself, sir, to withdraw you from my establishment."

To be sent to Coventry was the most dreadful of all M. Bertin's punishments. During the appointed time, the culprit was forbidden the least intercourse with his schoolfellows. No one spoke to him, no one approached him. Excluded from all games, from all conversation, he dared not speak to any one, or seek the slightest aid or expression of sympathy, under pain of having the term of his punishment doubled.

Such was Jean Paul's heroic entrance upon his career as professor. One might have supposed that this first act of courage would have given him some assurance; but when he appeared at dinner, he seemed more embarrassed than ever. The ground gained in the morning by his firmness was lost, or at least was in danger of being so, by his frequent fits of abstraction, which never escaped the quick eyes of his little pupils. For instance, when they gave him the plate full of slices of beef, to pass round the table, he placed it before himself, in exchange for his own empty one. On perceiving his mistake, and the interpretation that might be put upon it, he blushed so excessively, and was so confused, that when M. Bertin handed his glass to be

filled with water, he poured nearly half the decanter over the side upon the cloth. Notwithstanding so many absurdities, Sara did not evince the least inclination to laugh, and as she was seated nearly opposite the poor youth, she bestowed on him many little polite attentions, which were not habitual to her, but were involuntary proofs of her kindness of heart.

Sara was not in the least timid herself, and could scarcely comprehend the malady; but she saw that it occasioned real suffering, and felt pity for those who were afflicted with it.

That evening, M. Bertin introduced Jean Paul into his private study. It was a large, sombre-looking room, with dingy furniture, and offered no other luxuries than those numerous volumes that clothed the walls, from the floor to the very ceiling. Study at once commenced, and the old professor was charmed by the avidity of his pupil's curiosity and intelligence. He saw at once, that the difficulties surmounted by Jean Paul, in his persevering solitary labour, had exercised and developed his faculties much more than the best lessons could have done. No doubt he might have learnt more under the direction of a clever master; but he would have learnt it less thoroughly.

Seated at a little table, with her back to him, and apparently quite absorbed in the book which was open before her, Sara listened to the lesson; and Jean Paul, who was at first rather surprised at her

presence, soon forgot it, and all things else, in the happiness of reading the Greek of Sophocles, and of Euripides, with a man who made him feel the slightest shades of delicate beauty in this language, "aux douceurs souveraines," so little appreciated by the greater part of those who study it.

CHAPTER XVI.

SCHOOL LIFE.

SCHOOL went on its accustomed round. Each of our young friends had written his first letter home, and had received such a tender one in reply—one which had so awakened home memories, that it was only by a great effort of manly pride that they had been able to restrain their tears. School life had already had its influence upon them—they would have thought it derogatory to their dignity as collegians to betray to the sight of any one in the world what their heart possessed of most worth. They had also learnt to understand the attraction of this mode of life, of union in study, of emulation, and of rule, rendered palatable by being universally binding. The elder boys went twice a day to the Lycée, and then prepared their lessons under the immediate care of M. Prosper, and the supervision of his father.

Robert applied himself to his studies with the same degree of energy that he brought to everything he undertook, whether of work or play; but, although he was quick and intelligent, study was not his forte, and he had resigned himself to being surpassed by his

brother, whose assistance he did not shrink from openly seeking when he found himself unable to surmount a difficulty.

Eugène, aided by that insatiable desire of approbation, which was the weak side of his character, and a snare, had, although very young, at once taken the head of his class. Arthur, accustomed to regard himself as a little phœnix, was much surprised to find himself deficient in every branch; and to have the conviction forced upon him that his professors considered him very backward for his age.

As to Jérôme, he had a goal before him. He wished to take the head of his class, and worked to that intent with extraordinary zeal. As he was not wanting in intelligence, he made real progress. But as there was a considerable disparity between his present attainments and the position he strove to reach, the poor child sometimes became discouraged.

One day Eugène found him seated at the foot of his bed, bitterly weeping; his elbows rested upon his knees; his face was hidden in his hands. He questioned him as to the cause of his distress, and was in the greatest astonishment when he discovered, by his cousin's broken sentences, what were the ambitious designs he cherished.

"You at the head of your class!" said he; "but you cannot surely think of such a thing, my poor Jérôme? You the first! Why, it is very well to be able to follow us; and I think M. Bertin would have done better to have made you enter the fifth.

"Oh, Eugène!" said the boy, with touching humility, "I am not quite so stupid as I seem to be; no one has ever taken the least interest in my progress, and I did not care about it myself. If you only could help me with some little things that I cannot understand, however much I try to, you shall see that I will work with all my might, and that I shall not long remain in the back-ground. I have never learnt the Latin grammar thoroughly—it is that which makes everything so difficult."

"Well, then, you must go through it again, from one end to the other, on your own account. I will correct your exercises."

"Yes; but the time! We have not too much as it is for the preparation of each day's lesson."

"And the recreation hour?"

"That is true; but it would not be enough. Ah, I know what I will do; I will rise an hour earlier than the rest every morning to study. No one will know it but you."

"But we ought to be up at five o'clock in summer, and at six in winter. And the class room is neither opened nor warmed before that hour."

"I can work here very well. I will make a little clear space upon my dressing-table."

"And the light?"

"I have a little money; I shall buy candles."

"All very well just now; but think what it will be in the winter, when it freezes, here in this room, which faces the north, and is never warmed."

"I will roll myself up in my blanket; I don't mind if I am cold."

"But, what can make you wish so much to make progress?"

"I want to have some prizes."

"Prizes! Are you mad?"

"You think, then, that however earnestly I work during the whole year, I cannot gain any?"

Eugène thought for a moment. These words of Scripture passed through his mind—"The last shall be first," and he answered—

"I do not know—perhaps—but it will be difficult; and then I intend to work hard too. I never thought you had so much ambition! So great a thirst for glory!"

"Oh no; it is for my mother," said Jérôme.

"Your mother! I thought she did not care." He was going to add, "about you"; but, fearing to cause pain he stopped short—then said "about your studies."

"That is true," said Jérôme, in a tone of discouragement; "but I often think if I could do her honour, she would, perhaps, like me better. I have given her little cause of satisfaction so far. Last year I saw the distribution of prizes at Lyons. There was one little boy who got nearly all of them, and every time that he carried one to his mother, she looked on him with such joy, and seemed so proud! When we went out, I saw them again in the street; they were walking together, looking so happy. Peo-

ple said she was a widow, and that he was her only son. Oh, how delightful it must be to give so much pleasure to one's mother!"

"Yes," said Eugène; "but there are many ways of giving them pleasure. At home, mamma looks happy every time I have resisted temptation, or repressed a bad feeling; and I am sure nothing makes her so sad as to see me do wrong."

"And yet I think that mothers love those children most who do them honour," persisted poor Jérôme, who had only too much reason to be assured of the fact, from his own experience. "I should like to have mamma love me as much as she loves my brother."

It was the first time he had let Eugène see this secret suffering of his heart.

Eugène was touched by it, and remembering the love with which he had been surrounded all his life, he felt a movement of tenderness towards the poor child, who had been so cruelly deprived of it.

"I would willingly help you," he said, as he embraced him, "but I must work hard myself. At any rate, we will encourage each other."

The next morning, Jérôme rose at five o'clock, and when the dressing-bell—that bell so detested by the idle—rang at six o'clock, it found him up long since, and prepared, by his private study, for the labours of his class. To be able fully to appreciate this courageous effort, you must know how much Jérôme loved his bed, and how little he was naturally inclined to be active.

But the actuating cause was stronger than all opposing sentiments, and if once or twice he allowed himself to be conquered by indolence, it made him so unhappy all the day, that he most carefully avoided falling into the same fault on the morrow. For some time he awoke very frequently during the night to look at his watch, thinking the hour must have arrived; but the habit was soon acquired, and the neighbouring clock did not strike its five solemn strokes until Jérôme had made some progress with his toilette.

Nobody in the house had the slightest idea of Jérôme's plan, and as the lads went to bed at nine o'clock his health did not suffer from it in the least. M. Bertin and his son were astonished at the little fellow's progress; for they had at first considered him to rank amongst the most backward and least intelligent. M. Bertin, knowing that those who appear sleepy and stupid sometimes give proof of greater facility for acquiring knowledge than the brightest and most lively, merely remarked that the child did not want for talent, though it had been concealed under a thick envelope. In time he hoped to make something of him.

His school-fellows did not look below the surface, and rather despised the poor lad, who was so inexpert and showed so little agility in play, and who was too often so silent that they could not get a word from him; for, being altogether absorbed in his great preoccupation, he could not be merry, and did not know

how to enter into a joke. M. Prosper was very severe, and enjoyed embarrassing him before all his class-mates, by asking him questions ambiguously worded; and he not unfrequently indulged in sarcasm, of which the terms were very polite. Poor Jérôme was often the only one unable to perceive that he was being laughed at.

One Thursday morning, — with the exception of Eugène and Jérôme who would not allow themselves to be distracted by the whisperings around them, — all the class was in a state of excitement most unfavourable to the proper reception of the lesson. Arthur, who had a natural gift for drawing, and seldom exercised it but for caricature, sketched such a comical resemblance of M. Prosper, that the boys, as they passed it on from desk to desk, had the greatest difficulty not to shout with laughter. The worthy gentleman was for the moment so absorbed in an explanation, that he did not perceive anything of it; but raising his head at length, he glanced suspiciously at the two rows of faces in which fun was manifestly lurking.

The scrap of paper was in Jérôme's hand, and he, entirely absorbed by a question in Syntax, never thought of passing it on; and without being at all conscious what he was doing, had written his name upon it.

"Show me that paper," said M. Prosper, in a tone of authority.

Jérôme stretched out his hand, and many other

hands were extended to pass it to the judge. M. Prosper blushed as he looked at it. It was utterly impossible to feign ignorance of its meaning. It was too evidently himself with his spectacles, his starched cravat, and his contracted features. Every little thing was faithfully delineated; and there was an air of reality given to the whole in spite of its exaggeration. Jérôme's name was written quite legibly underneath.

"Did you do this?" asked the original when he had contemplated his image.

"No, sir," said Jérôme; "it was not I."

"But it is your name that I see written there; is it written by your own hand, examine it."

"Yes, sir!"

"You are then the author of this fine joke? Really you might do better than employ the wits you generally succeed in hiding so completely, in taking liberties of this kind. They will not do for me, sir."

"But, sir, I do assure you it was not I; I do not know how the paper came into my hands. I was thinking of something else, and did not even look at it."

"A very likely story! How did it happen then that you wrote your name upon it?"

Jérôme could not say; he could only repeat that it was not he.

"Who was it then? At least tell me who is guilty if you are not so yourself."

Jérôme was silent, and looked at his companions with an air of entreaty. Eugène was ready to speak. He was indignant that Arthur should still be silent, and looked at him most significantly. The fear of being thought a tell-tale restrained him.

"Leave the room!" said M. Prosper to Jérôme, who obeyed without a word.

M. Prosper put the paper in his pocket and resumed his explanation; but it was easy to see that he was greatly irritated, and that he had been wounded in a sore place.

"It is shameful!" said Eugène, as he leaned behind the little boy who separated him from Arthur; "it is cowardly!"

Arthur shrugged his shoulders, and whispered still lower:—

"What's the harm? I did not say it was he."

M. Prosper was kinder to Arthur, than to any other of his pupils. Was it on account of his name, or his fortune? Was M. Prosper dazzled by such trivial distinctions in this sanctuary of science, where the only superiority should be that conferred by study and intelligence, or was it a handsome face, an aristocratic mien, a little spice of the insolence of a spoilt child, which caused him to show this preference? Nobody knew; but the fact was indisputable.

Poor Jérôme went to suffer his unmerited banishment in the garden. What most troubled him was to miss the lesson on which he had so reckoned

to clear away certain difficulties that harassed him. He walked slowly, along those paths which were the furthest from the house, raising the dry leaves which were lying to some depth upon the ground; when he saw a person advancing towards him whom he had as yet only seen at meals. It was Sara, who only entered the garden during study hours, and who was quite surprised to meet with one of the boys. She remarked the lad's look of consternation, and came forward to ask why he was not in his class.

"I have been turned out," replied Jérôme.

"Indeed, what have you been doing?"

"Nothing; only it seems that without knowing it, I wrote my name under a caricature that some one had made of M. Prosper, and he naturally thought I had done it."

"A caricature of my dear and noble cousin," said Sara, laughing with intense inward pleasure. "I can understand that his dignity would suffer from such an affront. But who did it, then?"

"I do not know, nobody would confess to it."

"And he has let you be punished instead of him! He is a coward! I despise him! But pray don't look so desperately miserable. You have done nothing wrong, you are unjustly punished; and after all, perhaps you are not sorry to take a turn in the garden instead of listening to my learned cousin."

"You are mistaken there," said Jérôme. "We were about to have a passage in Cæsar explained to us, that I have not been able to understand, and a

rule upon the participles that I do not know how to apply. Missing the lesson is the very thing that annoys me."

"Really," said Sara, "you surprise me; have you your Cæsar?"

"Yes, it is here."

"Well, what will you say if I can help you?"

"You!" said Jérôme, who appeared still more surprised at the young lady's proposition than she had been at his zeal.

"Yes; but you must promise not to tell anyone. You know I told you the first day you came that there were apparitions in the house, but some of them are good and benevolent spirits, very useful, and ready to help those who are at all embarrassed. We will seat ourselves on that bench upon the grass; no one will see us there from the house, and we shall have plenty of time before the play hour. Show me the passage."

Jérôme obeyed without being quite sure whether Sara was really in earnest. It did not take her long to make clear and simple what had appeared so obscure and difficult. She had a way of making him understand it by himself, which rendered the lesson doubly valuable to him.

She afterwards explained the rules relating to the participles, which had hitherto seemed quite beyond his powers of comprehension—made him apply them in various sentences and did not leave him until she was sure that he had penetrated to the very depths

of this grammatical mystery. Then she told him that whenever she could be of use to him, he had only to let her know, and she would most willingly aid him.

"Ah, yes; but the Greek!" said Jérôme.

"Well, the Greek, what of that; it is not worse for an apparition to speak Greek than Latin."

"But I thought you were a little girl," replied Jérôme in his slow tone of astonishment, as he hesitated with doubt and embarrassment at sight of the feminine garments, and short hair of his little professor.

"Learn to be a little more respectful towards a personage who will be sixteen next year," said Sara, laughing. "I tell you I am a spirit. Provided it is useful to you, what need have you to know anything further?"

And she ran off leaving Jérôme quite amazed at his adventure, but very well satisfied with its scientific results.

CHAPTER XVII.

CIVIL WAR.

JÉRÔME had scarcely been left a moment alone, when the garden-door opened, and a troop of school-boys, like a cloud of talking, quarrelsome birds, alighted upon the lawn, of which dry, crisp leaves formed the only ornaments. A little group immediately separated themselves from their companions.

It comprised all who were interested in the affair of that morning. Robert and Eugène vehemently attacked Arthur, and accused him of cowardice. Others took his part, and pretended that, so long as he was not asked the question point-blank, he had a right to be silent.

"What! and let another boy be punished in his stead?" asked Eugène.

"Pooh, pooh!" replied Arthur; "the young cub is not much to be pitied. He has been sunning himself a little under this wall, and, as you may be sure he will never be caught in any flagrant offence in the way of caricature, this little sin will soon be forgotten. As for me,—do you know that it was through my devotion to the common weal that I did not become

my own accuser? It would not have done to draw attention to this talent with which nature has endowed me for your amusement, and for the refreshment of your weary spirits during the long fatiguing hours of study. That dear M. Prosper has so much modesty, that the fear of seeing his features reproduced too often by the genius of my pencil, might have induced him to observe me a great deal too narrowly. He may watch Jérôme as assiduously as he pleases; but I believe he will never catch him in the act."

"That does not prevent its being cowardly to let another boy be accused in your stead," said Robert, whose high sense of honour revolted from such conduct.

"Well, then, why did you not say it yourself?"

"Because it was not for me to speak. He who was guilty ought to have acknowledged it himself. None of the rest had a right to speak, even to avoid a universally-inflicted punishment."

"That is sublime, that is!" exclaimed Arthur, ironically. "It is a pity to make such a fuss about nothing."

The dispute was growing more serious, when M. Prosper's appearance on the scene suddenly brought it to a close. They could not explain the cause of their debate; it was, therefore, best to appear friendly. M. Prosper looked more starched and dignified than usual. He wished to appear indifferent, and to make them believe that he had already forgotten the offence

of the morning; but he only succeeded in convincing every one that it was impossible for him to forget it for a moment.

"Gentlemen," said he (he always addressed his pupils in this manner), "neither my father nor I can take the oversight of you this morning. An imperative duty requires our presence elsewhere. I hope that you will not profit by this circumstance to conduct yourselves in a way that would bring shame upon you, and grief and affliction upon us. M. Hermann will report to me on my return."

This harangue was followed by a profound silence; but it was not the silence it had been intended to produce. M. Prosper had scarcely withdrawn, when the air rang with a general burst of laughter.

"How amusing he is, with his fine speeches," said one.

"How stupid he is, with his solemn airs," said another.

The half-hour of recreation was over, and the bell sounded for class. The little boys had had leave to amuse themselves in the garden until noon, whilst M. Hermann presided over the upper class. But he did not find the boys either more reasonable or more easy to govern than their juniors. For half-an-hour all went on smoothly. The pens ran along the paper; dictionary leaves were turned over with quick fingers; scarcely a whisper was to be heard,—but such excessive goodness could not last. The greater part of the boys

soon arose, and declared that they should be ready in time, and would work no longer. Jean Paul vainly insisted that there must be perfect silence in the class until twelve o'clock: nobody heard him. They pushed aside the tables, they overturned the forms, and one of the boys got upon the master's desk, and began to make an oration to the assembly, in a style in which the comic and heroic were strangely mingled; the orator was frequently interrupted by loud cheers. Oh, what a task! What a sad and hopeless task for a young lad of seventeen to be obliged to keep in order a troop of fellows scarcely younger than himself, and very little disposed to acknowledge his authority. Jean Paul was in despair, and did not know in what way to extricate himself from his difficulty. He could not even succeed in making himself heard.

But unexpected aid arrived in this critical moment. When the tumult was at its height, the door was opened, and an aged man of venerable aspect, but erect and imposing, appeared standing at the entrance.

"Is there a revolution?" asked he, whilst every one stopped short; and the orator, looking foolish enough, descended from the platform in the middle of one of his finest bursts of eloquence.

The elder boys were well acquainted with this friend of their master, who sometimes joined them unexpectedly at table, and who had always a good word of advice and kindness for each of them,

concealed in what seemed a joke. After a moment's conversation with Jean Paul, who had turned to him as to an angel sent from Heaven, he again faced the boys.

"I was not deceived," said he. "It is really the upper class that I see, composed of boys of twelve, thirteen, and fourteen. I really might have supposed you had been little fellows, who did not yet know how to distinguish your right hand from your left. Ah! my young friends, you will never be Goethes."

Some of the boys knew the name he had just mentioned, and asked why they should not be like Goethe.

"For many reasons, no doubt. One of them you will learn from the little story I am about to relate."

They clustered around him, whilst he assured them that his story was very short, and he was glad of it, as otherwise he should not have time to relate it.

"It is an anecdote, the chief merit of which is, that it relates to a great man, and lets us see the germ of that strength of character for which he was so much distinguished through life. Goethe, as a child, showed a stoical indifference for the laughter and jeers of his comrades, and even for the pain which they inflicted on him by blows and ill-treatment; but, after bearing it all patiently for a considerable time without any complaint, he sometimes cast off his indifference, and allowed a righteous anger to triumph for a moment over his sense of dignity. But you shall see how, even at such

moments as these, he respected school-authority and discipline. On a certain day, one of the professors was prevented from giving his lesson; and the boys, left to their own resources, began to converse quietly together; but, after a while, Goethe's friends having withdrawn, he was left alone with three young scamps, who determined to drive him away by their annoyances. To this end they left him a moment, and returned armed with birches drawn from a broom in all haste. The boy guessed their object, but as he was firmly resolved never to avenge himself during study-hours, he determined to remain immoveable until the clock struck the hour for play. His enemies began to whip his legs most unmercifully. He did not stir; but the pain he suffered seemed most terribly to prolong the minutes. Anger increased with suffering. At the first stroke of the clock, he seized one of his tormentors by the hair, when he was least expecting it, threw him on the ground in a twinkling, and held him down by planting one knee upon his back. Then he succeeded in passing the head of another, who being younger and weaker, had attacked him from behind, under his arm, whilst he nearly strangled him with squeezing it against him. The third remained,—a strong, vigorous lad, and Goethe had only his right hand to defend himself with. Yet he seized him by the coat, and succeeded in flooring him,—there he lay extended at his feet, his face against the floor. In the meantime, they all three kicked, bit, and pinched him, as best they

could; but he, little hero, was all unconscious, so completely was he possessed by the spirit of vengeance. He profited by the advantage given him by his position to thump their heads together from time to time. This made them scream so fearfully, that they were soon surrounded by all the household. The rods scattered all over the floor, and Goethe's bleeding legs, rendered their testimony in his favour. It was evident that he had been pushed to extremities, and they let him go without punishment. I do not recommend, my young friends, that you should imitate the great man in his vengeance, but only in his submission to discipline."

The story had produced its effect. These great boys were rather ashamed of having allowed themselves to be surprised in so flagrant a dereliction of duty; and when the narrator who arrived so opportunely had disappeared, everyone resumed his occupation.

"Who is it?" was asked by the new comers, of the other boys.

"It is one of M. Bertin's friends. He was once a professor himself. He comes here now and then, and always chooses the moment when he is least expected. He is very good, and everyone likes to hear him talk, because he knows everything, and —"

"Oh, oh!" said Arthur, "he who knows the most knows simply that he knows nothing: at least so they taught me to write for six long months, in a fine, bold round hand, in my copy-book, and I have thought ever since that it was just as well to arrive

by one gigantic stride at the crowning point of scientific lore, without passing through any tiresome intermediate process."

"Keep your wit to yourself, Arthur," said one of the smaller boys, "you will always know one thing well enough, at any rate."

"And what may that be, pray?"

"That you are the proprietor of the Château d'Ermance. I do not think the fact is ever one moment absent from your mind; and there is another that I will undertake to remind you of occasionally, when you forget it, and that is, that you are the vainest fellow I ever set my eyes upon."

This was said in consequence of a former conversation, during the course of which Arthur had mentioned, with much ostentation, the magnificence and luxury of his childhood, and had spoken contemptously of two of his comrades, who confessed that they had only a maid-of-all-work in their family. Certain it is, the expressions, "my servant," "my horse," "my château," were more frequently interspersed in the chit-chat of the young heir than was warranted by good taste; and his school-fellows punished him for it by calling him "*My Lord*," with an air of deferential raillery, which was highly obnoxious to him. He was especially haughty towards the inoffensive Jean Paul, who, for his part, asked nothing more than to be allowed to pursue his studies, and to fulfil his duties, in peace; and never thought of desiring to measure himself in any way

with his father's old pupil. Arthur, in a word, took the very best method to render himself disagreeable to his companions; and it is obvious that he who makes enemies and judges of his natural allies, leaves himself but small chance of happiness during his school career.

Discord, then, seemed upon the point of breaking out. Arthur, who possessed a certain *sang-froid*, more irritating to his adversaries than an outburst of violence would have been, had replied in such a manner as to impose silence for the moment. Jean Paul made some ineffectual efforts to restore order; there was no one to back him, for a *deus ex machina* cannot be expected twice in the same hour. The poor youth, utterly beside himself, at the sound of the bitter, wounding words that were hurled about in all directions, hid his face in his hands, and called all good angels to his aid. No doubt he saw in vision the little quaint table where he had so many times translated his Euripides, without other disturbance than the noise made by the children in their play, and by their impromptu caresses. Perhaps he saw, at the same time, his mother's look of resignation,—his father's bald head, and slightly curved figure. He raised himself with sudden resolution, and said, in a tone of decision,—

"You have no conscience; you do not know what duty is!"

These two words, "conscience" and "duty," conveyed a distinct meaning to Robert's mind. His

father had taught him their true value. He could not remain deaf to such an appeal, and returned at once to his seat. One example is often sufficient to draw the multitude towards good, as well as towards evil; the boys followed him, and order was re-established in the class-room.

Jean Paul's trials were not always of a nature equally endurable. His severest difficulties arose out of the inimical feelings of M. Prosper. Ever since the little boy whose part he had taken, had been publicly exposed, his endeavours to convict the poor usher of a fault had been ceaseless. He kept watch over every instance of mal-address, or of absence of mind. Valentin, now restored to his place in the school-room, ably seconded his views, being one of those who rarely learn anything, but who more rarely forget. Between them, and yet without the appearance of any formal compact, there was not a single petty vexation that they shrank from inflicting. Jean Paul bore everything with the most exemplary patience; living upon the hope of his undisturbed evening labours, during those enchanting hours passed in M. Bertin's study. Besides, the old professor showed him quite sufficient consideration to atone amply for his son's contemptuous treatment. He wondered for a long time in what manner Sara occupied those long evenings which she passed in utter silence, apparently absorbed in reading what he suspected to be a book for children, or an elementary lesson-book. Light dawned on the fact at last.

As Jean Paul read aloud a passage from the Œdipus Colonus, with all the enthusiasm inspired by the majestic simplicity of the poetry, he encountered Sara's beaming eyes fixed upon him, with an expression of such intense enjoyment and earnest attention, that he at once perceived he was understood. She regretted to have been betrayed, and bent her head again over her book; but it was too late. The professor's eye had followed the little scene in silence. He smiled, called Sara, and, whilst drawing her towards him, gave her the little accustomed taps of fondness.

"Never mind, little girl, now that you have betrayed yourself; you may sit by us and listen. She must be forgiven for understanding Greek; because she is, at the same time, the most devoted of the little familiar spirits that an old pedagogue has ever managed to confine to his study. No one but she ever touches my books or papers. No one but she knows how to find, in a moment, the volume I require, or the very paragraph at which I would open. We have lived together for eight years, in this dust of scientific and historic lore, nibbling together our yellow old books, like an old rat and a little mouse, who have sworn eternal friendship. We never tire of each other. I should not know how to work if I did not hear my little mouse nibbling her share of our booty at my side. Since I opened the door of my study to her, more light and gladness have entered it than I enjoyed during all the rest of my life.

"She warms up my heart, and I teach her what I know. What can I do more? If I were a woman, it would be music and embroidery; but she is obliged to be satisfied to learn what her old professor has it in his power to impart."

Jean Paul could make no remark; but he thought this tender union of affectionate sympathy between the old man and the little girl very beautiful. From that moment, Sara seated herself at her uncle's side during the lesson, and though she did not speak, it was easy to perceive, by the varying expression of her countenance, that she was no stranger to any of the calm and profound delights of intellectual research, which filled this hour,—an hour that always seemed too short to every one of the trio.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LETTER.

THE time which sped for our young Lycéens with that degree of rapidity insured by a regular succession of the same occupations, passed rather more slowly for those who were left behind. Madame d' Ermance was proud of the letters sent by her grandson. She persisted in believing — although he never spoke to her of his occupations — that he had achieved marvellous successes, of which his natural carelessness alone prevented his speaking, and often pitied him for being in a house which, from his report, seemed to be badly managed, and where he was deprived of things which were positive necessities to those who were bred in a certain degree of refinement. The idea that her darling should be obliged to content himself with soup twice a week, and be compelled to eat milky rice pudding, which he had always so detested, two other days, went to her very heart. She was astonished that he made so few complaints; but even more so that M. Gérard should have chosen to place his nephew in such a school, and many were the letters in which

she entreated him to go and see whether Arthur were not really suffering, from being compelled to adopt a diet so different from that to which he was accustomed.

But M. Gérard went away suddenly, according to custom, upon one of those distant expeditions in which he so delighted; so that when these letters reached him in Asia, where he slept under a tent, and lived mostly upon rice, prepared with water instead of milk, he did not feel much disposed to trouble himself about the privations of his nephew.

The solicitude of Robert and Eugène's parents followed another direction. Robert's letters made them fear that he was careless as to success in his studies; whilst Eugène, on the contrary, spoke of them with a degree of ardour, which seemed to spring rather from a desire to distinguish himself, to outdo others, and to obtain commendation, than from any right ideas of duty. This gave them some anxiety. They knew if once the thirst for that glory, which comes from this world only, enters the young soul, it may speedily degrade and defile it. Love of triumph may destroy the love of right. Is he who accustoms himself always to work in hope of reward, likely to know not only how to dispense with approbation, but even to risk incurring blame in pursuance of his duty? After having prayed fervently for this child, whom she did not love better than the others perhaps, but whose soul was yet

linked with her's by a closer bond, Madame Hervé decided to write to him all that she had in her heart.

It was the end of a long December night. Eugène and Jérôme both astir and shivering in their frozen chamber, although well wrapped up in their counterpanes, were working by the light of a candle,—the one writing at the end of a little dressing-table, the other pacing the room, reading his Cæsar. Eugène had resolved to be the first in recitation. He repeated several chapters of the Gallic War, over and over again, and never could feel quite sure of his memory.

"Eugène," said Jérôme, "I cannot understand this passage."

"Leave me alone! You must see, you put me out."

"Oh, if I only might interrupt you one moment, I would not do it again; indeed I would not. I cannot possibly go on."

"You are very tiresome, Jérôme; you do not know how much need I have of all my time this morning."

"I will not keep you long!"

"I tell you I do not want to be disturbed. Get on as well as you can. It is not good for you either, to have the most difficult parts always done for you."

Poor Jérôme bent his head and recommenced his work without speaking; but his mind was bewildered,

and it was impossible for him to discover the sense of the difficult passage that he had to translate. Eugène could so easily have helped him through it. The tears gathered in his eyes; but he did not let them overflow. Shortly afterwards, however, he thought he had a gleam of light, and saw his way out of the inextricable labyrinth of words in which he had found himself. He resumed his work with intense ardour. At the same moment, Eugène threw down his book impatiently, and exclaimed :—

"I shall never be able to get all this rubbish into my head!"

"Will you say it to me," said Jérôme, stretching out his hand for the book; "you shall repeat all the passages of which you are the least sure."

"No," said Eugène, who did not wish to receive a service from one to whom he had just refused assistance. "No, I do not need to trouble you."

And he resumed his walk, again whispering his lesson.

When the bell rang at the end of half an hour, Eugène declared himself ready.

"I wish I were!" said poor Jérôme, who, by offering to help his cousin, had lost the thread of the ideas which had begun to dawn upon his intellect. The trouble caused him, by the knowledge that time was fast passing, together with the muttered recitations of Eugène, which he could not prevent himself from hearing, effectually prevented any further illumination.

Eugène took the first place, according to his ardent wish. On returning home, he found the following letter from his mother.

"Your last letter, my dear boy, gave us great pleasure; for it assured us that you continue to study with as much zeal as success. You are quite right in thinking that your progress is the best proof you can give us of your love. We desire that you should have—your brother and yourself—as complete an education as possible; and to this end it is, we have submitted to our separation, which has been a great sacrifice; so that it would be very trying to us if you did not do all in your power, to profit by the opportunity we have given you. I rejoice over the perseverance and strength of will you have manifested in your studies, and wish my own dear child could read in his mother's eyes the happiness he has occasioned her.

"But still, perhaps, it would not be unalloyed. You know that I desire the development of your heart still more ardently than that of your intellect. Do you let it have its due, this heart-culture, in the life of study you are leading, where there seems to be no other positive duty than that of work? I fear you do not enough remember that in the sight of God, all you can acquire and learn, is of little importance in itself, and that if pride and selfishness are nourished by success, it is positively displeasing to Him. It is not in order to discourage you that I speak in this manner, my boy; but be-

cause I wish that you should put everything in its legitimate place, and that you should remember that the end of life is neither to know nor to succeed, but to do the will of God.

"Never allow the desire to be first in your class make you forget or set aside the interests of others; above all, never let your studies interfere with prayer

"When you are conscious of a movement of satisfied vanity, carry the feeling to God, and ask Him to help you to overcome the temptation; and if you perceive that your heart is becoming harder and less loving, ask Him to warm it; and remember that in His sight who has given His life for us, and accepted for our sake all earthly scorn and humiliation, the most trifling act of love is of greater value than the most brilliant intellectual successes."

Eugène read these pages again and again.

He seemed to hear his mother's voice. How many times had she spoken to him in this way, and put him on his guard against his besetting sin. In her presence he had never forgotten to watch; but, far away, he had yielded to the impulses of his nature, and for some time past, had had no thought for aught save study, or, rather, the rewards that study could procure; for it was not with him, as with Jean Paul, a disinterested passion. He had neglected prayer, too, and felt able to sleep in peace when his lesson was prepared for the following day; hurrying to bed, in order that he might arise the earlier on

the morrow. How could his mother have divined the truth? No doubt her love for him had established some mysterious connection between her heart and that of her child, of which she alone was conscious. The letter arrived at the right moment; Eugène read it once more, and kissed it, as he thought of the dear hand that had traced its lines, then put it carefully into his pocket-book, and turned towards his cousin, who had also received a letter, and having read it, had let it fall upon the table with an expression of disappointment.

"I was very selfish this morning! Forgive me, Jérôme. Would you like to work with me for an hour every day? I will help you, and you will see how much faster you will get on."

"But," said Jérôme, whose countenance had lighted up with hope, "you cannot lose your time because of me."

"I shall not be losing my time. People always know that best, which they have explained to others: besides, I will try to study all the more diligently the rest of the day. But what is the matter? You have not had bad news?"

"Oh very good; cannot you read me a little of my aunt's letter?"

Eugène read some of it to him.

"You see," said he, "mamma approves of my helping you, even if I make less progress myself. But what can be the matter with you? You are crying."

Jérôme in reply handed his mother's letter. There was a great contrast between it and that he had just heard. His mother gave him a little advice, which showed she had no idea of the great thirst of his heart, or of the struggles especially incident to one of his peculiar disposition; there were a few particulars respecting his home, and then you saw too clearly how glad the writer had been to arrive at the end of her troublesome duty. She spoke with indifference of his studies, as if she thought him incapable of anything beyond mediocrity, and seemed to ask nothing of him, because she expected nothing.

"Do you not think, that if she should one day be proud of me, she would love me more?" repeated the poor child.

Eugène could scarcely understand the connection between the two things; but he entered fully into Jérôme's ardent desire, and secretly determined to help him to realize it as far as he was able; and to this end he resolved to watch over his cousin's progress as anxiously as he did over his own. If it was touching to see the younger of these boys helping and encouraging the other with so much solicitude, it was no less so to witness Jérôme's humble docility and indefatigable perseverance. Eugène soon found so much pleasure in his cousin's advancement, that what he derived from commendation of his own efforts seemed comparatively tame.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SAPINIÈRE.

Poor Julien! It is long since we left him shut up in his chamber, and bruised all over by the terrible flogging he had received from his father; it is time to ask whether he was really reformed since the events of that sad evening. No! Sudden reformation is rare. Long patience and persevering effort, joined with earnest love, must be employed, before habits of inveterate deception can be uprooted even from a child's soul. God continually employs this patient love in his dealings with us; fathers and mothers often have it with their children, but Guillaumin knew nothing of it.

He was rough and inflexible, and without any pity for certain faults. When Julien was himself again, and permitted to take his place in the family, his father treated him with such marked coldness and displeasure, that the child's heart, which had been humbled for a moment by solitude and privation, closed and hardened itself anew.

This terrible lesson only taught him one thing, to have recourse to greater cunning, and more skilful

subterfuge, in order effectually to conceal his acts of disobedience.

His mother, more feeble and poorly than ever, had neither strength to resist, nor to punish him, and put a stop to his deceit. M. Hervé came to see her several times, and often tried to win a repetition of the confidence with which she had once relieved her burdened heart. She appeared to regret having spoken, and was more reserved and impenetrable than ever.

One morning Guillaumin was at home when M. Hervé called, and gave him to understand in such unequivocal terms, that the visits of strangers were anything but agreeable, that M. Hervé, seeing he could neither do good to the mother or to her little boy, who could never be induced to open his mouth in his presence, thought it best to take the hint. The little blind girl only had seemed to appreciate his visits; she knew the sound of his footfall, ran to open the door before he had time to knock, and raised her head towards him with a smile, which rendered the blank expression of the large sightless eyes, very touching. She was so sad, poor child, you might have said she was sensible that evil brooded over their household. She ought by rights to have been encircled by all that was most beautiful in life,—affection, and gladness. A mother always ailing, who spent her time in groaning and weeping as soon as they two were left alone;—a father moody and silent; brothers, of whom one was naturally grave

and reserved, the other, cross and embittered by an evil conscience, and by the severity with which he was treated;—all this could not constitute a family-circle favourable to such a child's development.

Everything essential was wanting; light and heat; therefore she resembled a flower faded before it blew.

As the poor woman grew worse every day, Guillaumin at length decided to take her to the city, to consult a physician of greater eminence than any they could hope to meet with in the country. The invalid dreaded the journey very much. It appeared long to her in prospect, though the whole of it could be accomplished in the course of a single day; but at length she consented to undertake it, and a mattress was spread at the bottom of the waggon on which she could partially recline. Guillaumin had contrived to adjust a sort of awning over the wretched vehicle, which effectually guarded its occupant from the piercing rays of the sun, and from the inquisitive glances of the passer-by; but he could not secure her from the jolting caused by the stony roads over which they were obliged to pass. Gaspard had to accompany his parents, so that Julien was left to take care of the house, and of his little blind sister. As he had always loved Esther, they thought he might be trusted; and his father's last words on parting confided her to his care; so the two children were left alone in quiet possession of the house, with bread, milk, cold potatoes, and cream cheese, in the pantry, and a long day before them. At first the

responsibility laid upon Julien appeared anything but onerous. He evinced more than usual tenderness for the little girl who had only him to lean upon. He led her into the orchard, and made her sit down under a tree, then he began to cut up little pieces of wood into the form of household utensils; she did so love to guess what they were by the touch, and to store them afterwards amongst her treasures.

He gathered flowers for her to weave into garlands; she could not discern their colours, but had sufficient taste and skill to twine them in graceful wreaths.

"How happy you must be, Julien," said the little girl after a long silence, during which she had been smelling the flowers he had placed upon her lap.

"Me happy! you are very much mistaken."

"Yes, indeed, you are very happy to see these beautiful flowers that I shall never see. The scent is so exquisite, and they are so softly delicate to the touch! Come, tell me a little about this one that I have in my hand."

It was a white flower shaded with white and yellow, and its corolla was finely formed. Julien did his best to describe it, and the little girl again repeated with a sigh, "How happy you must be!"

"Yes, I was happy enough, certainly, when my father nearly whipped me to death, and when he starved me for eight days upon bread and water, leaving me all alone! Nobody will envy me my happiness at any rate!"

"Listen to me, Julien; you might be happy, if you only would not do wrong things. You do not know the trouble you cause our mother. Sometimes at night when I am lying near her, I hear her groan and sob. She says such sad sad words—she repeats your name and—you know whose."

"My brother Marcel's! I am not ashamed to speak of him; not I indeed."

"Yes, Marcel's," whispered the little girl, in a low voice, as if she feared to be overheard. "Oh, Julien, how dreadful it would be if the time should ever come when we should not dare to speak of you in father's presence. I should die of grief, I know. I love you so dearly!"

"Be quiet," said Julien, "you tease me!"

Notwithstanding this unamiable reply to words breathing such ardent affection, the morning passed satisfactorily away; and the little fellow's heart was refreshed by the thought, that for once at least he had shown himself worthy of the confidence reposed in him. They went indoors a little before dinner, and the little blind girl, accustomed as she was to render herself useful in the household, very soon spread upon the table their modest store of provisions.

"Cold potatoes are not nice," said Julien, looking at them contemptuously.

"No, it is a pity we have no fire; if they were fried in butter, they would be much nicer. I know there is a little butter in the crock."

"Well, there's not much difficulty in lighting a fire—there's plenty of wood to be found. I will run and fetch some, and, with a few shavings, we shall have a fire in no time."

Esther clapped her hands.

"And we shall have a hot dinner instead of the cold one mother prepared for us! How funny it is to be here alone, and to do whatever we like, is it not, Julien?"

Julien lighted the fire without much trouble. Meanwhile, his little sister cut the potatoes in slices, and her brother then busied himself with the cookery. He did not manage his duties very well. The potatoes were either burnt, or remained white as before, but the children made light of the failure, and ate them with good appetite.

As they were terminating their repast with a morsel of cream-cheese, a voice behind startled them.

"Hey day! the little creatures live well. Belshazzar's feast, I do declare! Nothing left for a friend! Oh, no! Not even the outside of the cheese; they have eaten up everything."

Julien had turned round at the first outburst, and had recognized, with much consternation, his evil-genius,—the red-haired boy, Etienne. What chance had brought him there, just when they were all gone out, he could not guess.

"And so," said the naughty boy, "this is the way you receive me. It is charming to see how much pleasure one's visit confers, when one has taken a

world of trouble to find out people's whereabouts. But, come, I say, I want to tell you something. When you know what I came for, you won't look quite so cross. Stop, stop, little girl," said he to Esther, who was about to follow. "We don't want you."

He drew Julien a little to one side, and whispered a few words to him. He looked disturbed and irresolute, and replied that it was impossible.

"Nonsense!" replied Etienne. "When the cat's away, the mice will play! Now or never! I heard your father tell the blacksmith, who was shoeing your old nag, that he most likely should be away till seven or eight o'clock, and people are always longer than they expect to be, so you have nothing to fear."

"But I cannot leave my sister."

"Nonsense, I say! You have only to shut her up, and forbid her to stir."

"Oh no, it is impossible! and then she might tell. No, really; I cannot do it."

"Very well, then, Simpleton. You don't know what you are refusing. We are going to amuse ourselves most thoroughly. Two or three of us have got our pockets full of money, and we meant to treat you. But as you won't accept a kindness, stay where you are, and act the watch-dog. I don't envy you your occupation. Good-bye! I have already lost too much time for such a good-for-nothing fellow."

"Stay a minute, stay!" said Julien, as he saw him turn upon his heel. "Are you sure I can be at home again by seven o'clock?"

"What is there to hinder you? The fair is only a mile and a half from here, and you see the sun."

"Very well, then. I will go!" replied Julien, resolutely. "Make believe that you are going away, that Esther may not suspect anything. And wait for me under the large apple-tree at the turn of the road; I shall be there in a quarter of an hour at the very latest."

"Very well; though it is a deal of time to waste. A quarter of an hour, then, without a minute's grace. Good bye," said he, aloud, so that the child might hear the leave-taking, although she had caught no word of the preceding conversation. And he went off, whistling.

Julien had no time to lose.

"Shall I tell you what we'll do, my little Esther?" said he. "I have the headache, and must lie down a little, you shall do the same, and when we have had a little nap, we will return to the orchard. Do not call me when you wake, for I feel as if I should sleep a long time."

"I don't want to go to sleep at all," said the little girl.

Julien felt impatient, but restrained the expression of his feelings, and insisted upon the adoption of his plan with a degree of gentleness to which the expression of his countenance bore small analogy. At length Esther allowed herself to be persuaded, and lay down upon her mother's bed in the further chamber. Julien ran to his own room, put on his

Sunday clothes, and came down so softly, with his shoes in his hand, that even Esther, to whom sounds were peculiarly audible, suspected nothing. He closed the door of the house with the greatest care, laid the key under a large stone, and ran quickly to the apple-tree, near which Etienne awaited him.

They were bound for a fair in a neighbouring village. Etienne and his friends had determined to enjoy themselves thoroughly, and to finish off with some little affair that should not compromise them too much. For this they counted upon Julien, who had already served them upon a similar occasion, and who, although habitually deceiving his father, had made it a matter of conscience not to betray them.

They had been suspected of robbing the espaliers; but Julien's testimony was wanting to confirm their identity, and this he refused to give.

Esther, tired with being up before her usual hour, and with having passed all the morning in the open air, soon dropped asleep. When she awoke, she waited some minutes before disturbing her brother, when, at last thinking he had slept quite long enough, she called him several times. There was no answer. She ascended the staircase leading to his room, listened at the door for the sound of his breathing, felt in the bed, and was greatly astonished neither to hear nor touch him. Down she hastened, supposing him to be already gone into the garden.

Several minutes elapsed. Deceived in her expectations, she called and re-called his name. Still no

answer. Where could he be? She searched the kitchen, hoping he might be hiding from her in some obscure corner, and at last resolved to go out into the garden; but what was her astonishment to find the door fastened!

She could not move it with her poor little trembling hands, and knew not what had become of her brother. She sank down on the floor, leaned her head against the wall, and burst into tears. Why had he left her alone? Was she not already sufficiently miserable? The most unlikely ideas presented themselves to her imagination. Now she asked herself whether there had not been some family conspiracy to forsake her; then, again her fears took another direction, and she pictured to herself her mother stretched alone and dying upon the road. She extended her arms towards her, and cried, "Oh, mother!" The sound of her own voice made her sadder, and aroused her from this waking dream; but she soon fell into another. The profound silence reigning around frightened her. Poor child! she had no idea of life and security but from the sounds of human motion around her. Now no familiar voice was heard; not a movement disturbed the tranquillity of the dwelling. She felt as the clairvoyant might be supposed to feel, who should be suddenly transported from the brilliant sunshine to the depths of the darkest night. The motion of the pendulum was heard, it is true; but during a space of time, the duration of which appeared incalculable, no hour was struck. A fresh notion seized

her; perhaps the night had come whilst she slept? The idea of this double obscurity was a fresh source of terror. For a moment there was a sound of wheels, and the conductor's cries gave a truce to her fears, but the waggon passed on, and solitude was but the more dreary.

When at length the clock struck six, Esther plucked up a little courage; she knew now it could not be night, and hoped her parents would not be much longer absent. Alas! how ignorant the poor child was of what was passing around her. The fire lighted by Julien, and on which he had put far too much wood, had long smouldered quietly at the back of the chimney, but at length some burning chips had, in falling, lighted up a morsel of dry wood in front of the hearth, which was surrounded by shavings. It lighted up, and blazed cheerily. Little by little the fire communicated with a straw mat which the children had drawn there to kneel upon whilst they did their cooking; from the mat to a chair; from the chair to a table was the work of a few seconds.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIRE.

However slowly the old horse went, and however bad might be the waggon, our three travellers at length arrived at their destination. The doctor's report was not very satisfactory: he spoke of rest, good nourishing food, and tranquillity of mind, all things more or less difficult to obtain. The consultation over, Guillaumin took his wife to a small hotel, and asked for refreshments. He then left her to rest under the care of his son, and went out.

He traversed several streets, and stopped at a small house, into which he was soon admitted. He was shown into the study of an aged venerable looking man, who put down his book, and asked him to take a seat by his side.

"You are the father of Marcel Guillaumin, I think?"

"Yes, sir," replied Guillaumin, with a slight contraction of the muscles, which showed how painful the bare mention of that name was to him.

"And you have received the letter I sent you?"

"Yes."

"Then you know ——"

"I know nothing, and desire to know nothing. I did not read the wretched boy's letter. I burned it."

"What could induce you to do that?"

"I will have nothing to do with him! From the day when he dishonoured his name, he ceased to be my son."

"But if he repents! If he only asks one thing, the opportunity of repairing the past?"

"Sir, there are things that can never be repaired! If a member mortifies, it is cut off. That is what I have done. The young man belongs to me no longer."

"But what you say is terrible! If there are things that cannot be repaired, all at least may be pardoned. What would become of us if God should treat us as you treat your child? If there were no hope in Him for the poor sinner? Take care! You are preferring what you call 'your honour' to the boy's soul. God will call upon you to account for it."

"Every one has his own burden, sir. Mine is a heavy one,—but God will only call me to account for my own actions."

"If you did not read your son's letter, you at least read mine?"

"Yes, I read it."

"And you saw what I said to you of the sincerity of your son's repentance. You know how I became acquainted with him?"

"Sir, this young man is deceiving you; perhaps he deceives himself. There is no truth, no sincerity in him. He never had a conscience. Don't you be taken in by mere plausible appearances."

"You are very severe! It seems to me, however, that he has given *proof* of the sincerity of his intentions, first in quitting the course of life he had adopted, as offering an easy means of earning a livelihood, and secondly by the act of courage and devotion of which I was witness."

"To renounce the worthless trade of travelling comedian, that is to say the prospect of nearly dying every day of hunger, until you really die in the corner of a wretched hovel, is but a small sacrifice. And there is neither man or dog who would not be capable of the heroism of saving a child's life. I see nothing at all that will vouch for the future of him who has performed these great actions."

"Listen," said the old gentleman with much emotion. "The mother of that child whom he has saved, prays every day for him who has preserved to her her only earthly treasure. She is my child my only child, and this infant is all that remains to her of a happiness which the hand of God has shattered. You must understand the interest we take in this young man's career. If he is neither to find compassion nor pardon in his own father's heart, he

shall at least command kindness and assistance from us."

It was useless to prolong the conversation. Guillaumin rose, and bowed stiffly to the old gentleman, who conducted him as far as the door of his study and waited with his hand on the handle, as if to give him a last opportunity of bending his iron will saying—

"Beware, lest you draw down chastisement on your own head. The merciful shall obtain mercy. We have all need of it."

The inflexible Guillaumin did not reply, but went out with haughty look and firm step; his countenance was clouded, and his heart full of bitterness.

On leaving his father's house, Marcel, having no taste for the army, which is the ordinary resource of people in his position, engaged himself to a troop of wandering comedians. For some time this kind of life amused him; but the sentiment of right and wrong still left within his heart, united with the memory of the serious and exemplary habits of his father's house, again arose strongly within him, and soon disgusted him completely with the disorderly vagabond life he was then leading.

He sought for some employment which would enable him to relinquish the career so distasteful to him, by providing him with other means of gaining a livelihood; and, whilst reflecting upon the subject, strayed one evening upon the banks of a river, when heart-rending cries attracted his attention. He ran

hastily to the place whence they proceeded. A lady and an elderly gentleman were bending over the river, at a point where it was deep, and running between steep banks. The lady wrung her hands wildly, and called for help, whilst the old gentleman, with more calmness, sought out a spot where it would be less impossible for him to descend.

Marcel perceived the fair hair of a little child, floating on the water, as he was carried rapidly away by the current.

To tear off his coat, throw himself into the river, seize the child by those radiant locks, and bear him, living indeed, but all unconscious, to his mother's arms, was but the work of a moment. Thus it was that the outcast had won to himself a friend—a protector.

Marcel had never been utterly corrupted. At the very time when lightness of heart and love of pleasure caused him to deceive his father, there had been secret aspirations in his soul towards a life dignified by honour and ennobled by truth. He was weak and had not the courage to make any sacrifice to duty, and to those better instincts that struggled within him, against more powerful tendencies towards evil. Had his father stretched towards him a helping hand, and united indulgence and sympathy with the indomitable firmness of his rule, the poor boy might, perhaps, have retained his place amongst those accounted honourable by their fellow-men. Yet it may be, that it was only through his fall, and by

means of the humiliations and sufferings that attended it, that he was to find the moral strength so wanting to his character. Perhaps he might otherwise never have been able to appreciate between good and evil, and have been continually tossed about by their opposing influences. Certain natures require severe discipline.

On leaving the house where he had made another sacrifice to his implacable pride—for he had been more moved than he cared to avow, even to himself—Guillaumin returned to the hotel where he had left his wife. He said nothing to her of the conversation that had just taken place, nor had he told her of the letter received a few days previously from Marcel's new protector, accompanying that which he had burned unread. Pity was the only emotion excited by his poor groaning wife, whose weakness he considered as the cause of one child's ruin, and as at present slowly, but surely, working that of his little Julien. He never either asked counsel of her, nor reposed on her the troubles of his own over-burdened heart. Gaspard was his only comfort, in him he saw reflected his own nature, softened a little by youth; and the transcript of his firmness and inflexible justice, united with a little spice of benevolence.

The poor invalid resumed her place in the waggon, and they started. Seated in the front with his son, the father let his thoughts, usually so well controlled, wander free. He pictured to himself the time when

Marcel, his first-born child had lisped the name of father.

Souls, moulded like his, are less accessible than some to those daily repeated impressions which constitute the life of tenderer beings; but the emotions that do penetrate have a depth and intensity, which other men cannot even comprehend. He lived over again the time of his boy's childhood; and it seemed but yesterday that, assured of a position which would enable him to bestow a superior education upon his children, he had made plans for their future; and now what was become of it? Sad change! And all by the fault of that son who might have been the joy and prop of the family that he had ruined and dishonoured.

His fault,—and a voice from the inner depths of his soul added—"thy fault still more!" but he silenced it.

No word was uttered. The jaded horse advanced but slowly, and frequently required the whip. The last turn of the road had brought him to a spot whence they might perceive the Sapinière half hidden amongst large gloomy trees. Night had fallen on the world. The sun had set behind a curtain of clouds, and no reflection of its beams lingered upon the horizon. At the very moment when all naturally turned their eyes to seek the well-known roof, a burst of flame rises up behind the trees, and casts its lurid glow upon the heavens. Guillaumin and his son observe it with astonishment.

They cannot account for the phenomenon, for all is again obscured; but now a second blaze, more fierce than the former, leaves them no room for doubt. Guillaumin leaps from the waggon, throws the reins to Gaspard, and tells him to drive his mother, whilst he takes a shorter path.

He soon disappears behind the high hedges, and the horse continues the same jog-trot pace, which nothing can persuade him to change for one more befitting the agonizing apprehensions of the travellers. Gaspard tried to encourage a doubt whether it were really their own cottage, in the hope of reassuring his poor mother, but how could they doubt? There was no other dwelling in the neighbourhood, and the flames showed only too clearly the familiar outline of the trees immediately surrounding their home.

Guillaumin has run with supernatural speed; leaping ditches, hedges, and fences, and not allowing any obstacle to turn him aside from the direct route. He had but one thought—the children! From time to time the words were uttered by his hoarse, panting voice. When he arrived, part of the roof had already fallen in. The house was partly made of wood, and worm-eaten, so that little resistance was offered to the progress of the flames. He saw no one; and repeating yet again his cry of distress, was about to rush amongst the burning mass, when a man came from it, bearing a child in his arms.

"Father," cried he, "she is saved! Do not go there; you will perish!"

At the same moment, a fragment of the roof gave way, and fell upon the speaker. He rolled upon the ground, with the child whom he had shielded in his arms, and who had thus escaped the blow. What followed no one knew. The neighbours arrived, drawn thither by the lurid flames that had long smouldered, to burst forth with a power utterly relentless; everything was devoured, as if by magic.

Marcel had been laid in the carriage in his mother's stead; she forgot everything, in the joy of having found her boy, though she knew not whether he were still alive. Little Esther was seated on the knees of a woman, who vainly endeavoured to calm the nervous trembling which agitated her whole frame. It had been found impossible to enter the house. The fire had done its work, and one of the children was still missing!

Guillaumin was almost beside himself. He was like a feeble infant—alike incapable of thought or action. The strong man was bowed down. Had it not been for Gaspard's presence of mind, not even the most necessary measures would have been taken. In the meantime, evening was closing in, and as nothing more could be done for the miserable tenement, they were compelled to abandon it, and renounce, alas! at the same time, all hope of lighting upon any trace of the lost Julien.

As they still hesitated, an old man joined the sorrowful group. They consulted together in the utmost consternation, and he gathered that they were mourning over the frightful death of a child whom they believed to have perished in the flames.

"Of whom are you speaking; of the little fair-haired boy? Take my word for it, you've no need to trouble yourselves about him. He is not dead—not he! I have seen him myself, this very afternoon; he was on his way to the fair with his companions. Do you think a smart lad like that would stay and be burnt up like a grain of incense? No, no, depend upon it, bad seed is not so easy to lose."

So it became pretty evident that the accident had happened through some fault of Julien's. And now that all fears for his safety were removed, their thoughts turned upon their own miserable condition. Where should they find a roof to shelter them for the night, a cold night, in the very heart of November? The peasants seemed to vie with each other who should be most pressing as to the simple hospitality offered by their cottage-hearths. The family should be quartered here and there amongst them; but M. Hervé, who arrived at the moment when the mystery respecting Julien had been explained, had room for all; and took them home with him.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

THERE were four invalids taken that evening to Madame Hervé's care, for only Gaspard had escaped unhurt. Marcel appeared to be grievously wounded, and remained for many hours utterly unconscious. His father, whose state awakened still more anxious fears, was delirious, and either repeated, over and over again, in his incoherent wanderings, the curse he had pronounced upon his son, or ever and anon uttered, with wild anguish, those words he had himself listened to, on the very morning of the fire:—"Beware, lest you draw down chastisement upon your own head!" words that seemed prophetic, in their terrible and speedy realization. He seemed to have forgotten everything of recent occurrence, and to cherish only the memory of incidents relating to his eldest son. Julien was come back to them, and no one had had the courage to reproach him. He was moody and restless, and seemed in continual dread lest the conversation should turn upon the past; but they all thought it better to try to cheer and encourage him, than to crush by him

the severity of reproof. The catastrophe itself loudly spoke his accusation. In reply to their many questions, they drew forth the acknowledgement of his fault; but it was accompanied by no tokens of sorrow or repentance. He could give no clue to the origin of the fire; that which he lighted to cook the potatoes must, he said, have died out long before. There was no doubt, however, that it had caused all this disaster. It was more difficult to understand how Marcel should have arrived at the cottage at the very moment when his sister's life was in such imminent peril. As soon as he was able to speak, he gave the following account:—

"Not receiving any reply to the letter he had addressed to his father, he had not been able to resist the desire to come and wander around the dwelling, in the hope that he might at least behold him in the distance. He had remained a long time concealed in a coppice hard by, in the constant hope that some of the family would be going out of the house. He arrived after Julien's departure for the fair, and, therefore, saw no one. Astonished at the profound silence, and afraid to approach nearer to the cottage, in case he should meet his father, he was about to take warning by the fast approaching shades of evening, and withdraw, when suddenly a bright light and vivid sparks announced the fire, which had made the inside of the cottage a wreck before it mounted to spend itself aloft. He was on the spot in a moment, trying to enter by the

door, which he found it impossible to open. He was more than once repulsed from the windows, by torrents of flame and smoke, and was nearly convinced that the house was absolutely untenanted, when a feeble groan fell upon his listening ear.

The certainty that there was some one to save made him brave every danger. He burst into the cottage, and searched all around, in momentary dread lest he should be suffocated ere he had time to reach the object of his exertions. His foot struck against the body of the poor little child, who was stretched upon the floor. He raised her in his arms, rushed from the furnace, and found himself face to face with his father.

One day when Guillaumin was entirely restored to consciousness, M. Hervé entered his chamber with a book in his hand. He began to ask after his health, and whether he still suffered pain, and then enquired, whether he would like to listen to a few verses from the New Testament. As the invalid made a sign of assent, M. Hervé read slowly and impressively from one end to the other, that most touching of all histories—the Parable of the Prodigal Son; but he did not look at the sick man, or give him reason to suppose that he read it with a view to any personal application. When he reached the verse—*But when he was still afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion*—the large tears which had been gathering in the eyes of Marcel's father, flowed slowly down his rugged cheeks.

Perhaps it was the first time in his life that the hard man wept. He said—

"I cannot go to him, but I wish he would come to me!"

M. Hervé went to seek the poor boy, who was beginning to get about again, with his arm in a sling. He was quite overcome as he approached his father's bedside. The lost son was clasped to his father's breast, and held there long in a loving close embrace. Neither of them spoke, but their hearts met.

Later in the day, when he was again alone with M. Hervé, Guillaumin exclaimed—

"There is more than one prodigal son! I am one myself; and I too wish to return to my Father. Will he receive and pardon me, although I could not forgive my boy?"

"God does not measure his love by ours!" replied M. Hervé.

When he became convalescent, Guillaumin might be seen pacing one of the retired walks of the garden, leaning on the arm of that son who had long been lost to him, but who was now not only restored, but in a sense given afresh, for the relationship between them had gained a sweetness which had before been wanting. There were one or two subjects of reservation between them—too sad to be touched upon. Guillaumin could never bear to hear speak of the time when his son had been attached to the band of travelling comedians; neither could he make any

allusion to the circumstance in which all their misfortunes originated. These reserves prevented the establishment of perfect freedom of intercourse between father and son.

The time had come when he must, as it were, re-organize his life. The poor dwelling and still more humble furniture it contained, had constituted, if we except the plot of ground surrounding the little tenement, all Guillaumin's earthly possessions. He could not return to it with his family; for it was uninhabitable. M. Hervé had anticipated the moment of decision, and had already written to one of the partners of the firm in which he had so long held a situation. This gentleman replied by a letter addressed to Guillaumin himself, in which he offered, in the most honourable and affectionate terms, that he should resume his former occupation, the post having become vacant by the recent death of his successor.

To return to the very town where he believed his honour compromised; to occupy again the position he had so suddenly abandoned; to see all the well-known faces; and to place himself and his actions, as it were, before the tribunal of the evil-disposed and envious, by whom he had so laboured to be forgotten;—certainly it was a great sacrifice, and the best proof he could give of the change which had been accomplished in him.

M. Hervé represented that he owed it as a duty to his wife and children, to restore to them the situation

they had formerly occupied in society. He hoped that a careful education might be the means of arresting the growth of those evil tendencies which had so early begun to develop themselves in little Julien.

Guillaumin was persuaded. They took leave of the White House, and its inhabitants, and for some months M. Hervé had no tidings of them whatever. At length, the following letter was put into his hand:—

"Honoured Sir,

"I ought to have written to you long ago, to thank you for all that you have done for us, and to give you some account of our present position; but I have put off writing from day to day, in hope that the moment would come when I could say, All is right!

"But it is not come; and I begin to perceive that bad seed must always produce its own evil fruit, and that it would be mere infatuation for us to hope that this universal law should be reversed in our favour. We are reaping that we have sown, and so it must ever be. God may pardon, but He does not repair the ruin caused by our errors in this life. I am convinced of it, and do not murmur; but it cuts me to the heart, that my severity, and my wife's weakness, should have ruined our child.

"Not that I am angry with her, poor thing! She is gone, where no blame, no harsh judgment can wound her more. Ever since our return here, my

wife's health has continued rapidly to decline, and it is now eight days since we committed her remains to the tomb. She suffered much in this world, especially towards the close; and, although she placed all her confidence in Jesus Christ, who has purchased our redemption; yet, her physical sufferings were great, and extreme fear as to what might be Julien's future, caused her inexpressible anguish. It was out of our power to comfort her.

"The miserable boy has continued to cause us the most anxious solicitude.

"Immediately after our return, I placed him at school, under a very clever pious master, to whom I represented that Julien required to be held with a tight hand, and to be most carefully watched over. When he saw the child's sweet quiet manners, he seemed to think I must have exaggerated the case, and that he would be very easy to manage.

"For some time I heard no complaints; his obedience and other amiable qualities met with commendation. I allowed myself to hope that the disasters he had caused had been the means of changing his character; but, now I am convinced that nothing can transform the heart but the Spirit of God. Julien was ashamed and troubled at being looked upon as the instrument of our misfortune, but he was neither humble nor repentant; and since that time his heart seems to have been even harder than before. You will see by what follows that I have not judged him too severely.

"His mother was ill, when he was one day sent home to us with a letter, stating that he had been guilty of lying and stealing; in short, that he had conducted himself in so disgraceful a manner, that he was expelled the school. It was the drop in his poor mother's cup of sorrow that caused her death; for we could not hide our trouble from her. On the ensuing night she told me she was going, and wished the children to be called. They were soon all four gathered round her bed. She embraced and blessed them one after the other, and said she had no fear on Esther's account, God would be her light, and she confided her to Him. When Julien's turn came—he had stood a little on one side, partly concealed amongst the bed curtains—she said, in a voice so thrilling, that it made us all tremble—'Poor child!—poor child!' then added, raising her eyes to heaven, 'O God, pardon! O God, repair the wrong, and save my child for His sake, who came to rescue the erring!' She spoke no more, save to ask occasionally for a drop of water; for her lips were dry and parched.

"When all was over, I looked round for Julien; he had left the room, and nothing could make him enter it again to gaze on her whom he had so afflicted during her life. And yet she was beautiful to look at! It seemed as if the loveliness of youth had returned with the holy calm of death. Julien had wept; but how can we know the cause of those tears? God alone knows whether any of them flowed from genuine repentance.

"This, sir, is what I have to tell you. As to my gratitude, it is too deep for words to express. If my poor wife had hope and consolation in Christ, it is to your instrumentality we owe it. To you, too, I owe the blessing of having a son, my first born, now walking in the right way, beset by difficulties, but struggling on undaunted. He also, poor lad, has had to reap the bitter fruits of his past errors — coldness of former friends, distrust ill concealed, extreme difficulty in finding any honourable employment. More than once he has been on the point of renouncing city-life, and enlisting as a soldier; but his mother had such an invincible repugnance to this, that he was not willing to pain her, and now he has found something to do in a commercial establishment.

"As to Gaspard, he has resumed his studies, and his masters say he has not forgotten anything during this long vacation, and that, if he has not added to his stock of learning, his understanding is enlarged and his mental faculties much more vigorous. He will probably be able to become a tutor. Our little Esther is at Quinze-Vingts, where she studies music. It makes her very happy, and consoles her for the loss of sight. But she has been very delicate and sickly ever since she experienced such terrible emotions on the night of the fire. At the bare mention of the Sapinière she trembles like a leaf, and has a horror of fire that will very likely continue with her through life. And now, sir, I have written

you a long letter. I would fain believe that it may possess some little interest for you, and that you will at your leisure, honour me with a reply.

"Your obedient and grateful Servant,

"GUILLAUMIN."

M. Hervé read this letter with deep interest. He replied to it without loss of time, and whilst he expressed affectionate sympathy for Guillaumin, beset as he was with trials and with fears, he told him not to despair; for to do so would be to circumscribe the power and goodness of God, who is perfectly able to avert the evil consequences naturally resulting from our faults, and to sow the good seed where we have been sowing tares. "What would become of us," he added, "if we were always to pay the price of our misdeeds, and if a mandate of divine mercy were never pronounced to break the chain of innumerable links that sin forges and binds about us. As Jesus Christ came to sever by His Almighty power that chain of countless evils and of perdition, in which Adam's fall was the first link, even so there is a moment in the life of a man, when the Spirit of God comes into the heart to burst the net which sin has woven.

"He does not break all the cords at once; there are many which remain in force to the latest day of our existence, and which cause our hearts to bleed even to the end; but we know that we are safe in our Father's hands, and that while He does not

wish us to forget the bitter consequences of sin, He does wish us to remember who is called the *Repairer of the breach.*"

This letter was read over and over again; but it was not easy to open the poor heart so long accustomed to bitter brooding, to the joy and consolation of hope.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CONVERSATION BY THE FIRESIDE.

It is now time to revisit our friends of the Quartier-Latin. Whilst the events we have detailed took place at St. Réal, their school-days passed away in tranquil calm monotony, like the peaceful flow of a streamlet confined by verdant banks. M. Bertin had become aware of Jean Paul's struggles to maintain order amongst the little fellows composing his class; and seeing that he was unfitted for the labour, and exhausted by it, had almost liberated him from his onerous duties, with the ostensible purpose of pushing him forward in his own studies. He took such a real interest in the development of this extraordinary intellect, that he would willingly have sacrificed his own hours of study, to add to those at the youth's command. The evening hours spent together in the dusty library, became longer and longer, and the lamp frequently grew dim; ere one of the three happy friends thought of giving the signal for departure. No doubt, these long vigils were bad for Sara, as her pale cheeks and the dark circles around her eyes abundantly testified; but

she was not likely to complain, and her uncle never dreamed of the propriety of curtailing her enjoyment. Little by little the similarity of their tastes had established a certain degree of familiarity between the grave student and the little household-witch, in spite of all differences of character and disposition. Jean Paul found her a less formidable personage than an ordinary well-educated young lady would have been, and less jealous of the prerogatives of her advancing age. He bore with her merry jokes, and even allowed her to make fun of, and imitate his provincial accent, and to repeat in saucy mirth, whilst imitating some *gauche* movement or inelegant attitude:

Oui, je fus Grec, Pythagore a raison.

Her very impertinence put him at his ease; and if her vivacity and hasty words sometimes troubled him, at other moments her sudden gleams of inspiration served to illumine many an arduous task and obscure passage. Any one who had seen them bending together over Euripides would have taken them for two of those children of the middle ages, whose minds were nourished with the honey of antique literature imbibed at the feet of some hoary headed philosopher. But the illusion would soon be dissipated by Sara's lively peals of laughter, which quickly transformed her from the representative of the past, to the joyous creature of the present. To tell the truth, Jean Paul's pensive heavy expression did not aid you, any more than did

the constantly varying one of his companion, to lose yourself in poetical illusion.

Amongst the pupils, whom Sara rarely met with, save at the hour of repast, Eugène appeared to her to be the most amiable and intelligent. He never conversed with her; for her manners shocked him to such a degree, that he would rather have fled from than courted her presence. However, one Sunday afternoon he happened to be alone in the drawing-room, a slight indisposition having caused his detention at home, whilst the rest of his companions were spending the day amongst their relatives and friends.

Seated in one of those inhospitable arm-chairs, with which we have already made acquaintance, near a fire that was on the eve of dissolution, Eugène's thoughts flew to his father and mother and sisters, and to the dear White House where his early years had sped away so happily.

Not that he was sorry to have left it. Eugène knew too well that if he would become a man, the child should early engage in those struggles which cannot be met with in his father's house; but yet he was rather sad, and could not help contrasting the slowly dying embers with the bright beautiful flame, which was no doubt at that very moment consuming the great Yule Log in the chimney at his mother's side.

Absorbed in his reflections, he did not hear Sara enter the room. She approached him softly, and

guessed the current of his thoughts. Taking a foot-stool, she confronted Eugène on the other side of the fire-place, her chin supported by both hands in her accustomed attitude.

"Tell me something about your sisters," said she, plunging at once into the subject.

"What do you want to know about them?" asked Eugène, in a tone that gave small encouragement to his questioner.

"Whatever you like. In the first place, are they pretty?"

"What in the world do you want to know for?"

"Oh, I like everything that is beautiful very much, and nothing pleases me more than a pretty face! I saw a lady yesterday whom I could have looked at for hours, she was so beautiful."

"My sister Clémence is very pretty."

"Is she, really? Do describe her."

"She is fair, has blue eyes, and a small mouth; and then her hair is always so smooth and glossy, so carefully arranged, and her hands are so white."

Sara involuntarily passed her hand over the locks, which being long, had escaped from the restraining net, and were now flowing in wild disorder round her face and shoulders, and in doing so she became conscious that two of her fingers were stained with ink. She laughed, but blushed a little at the same time.

"Let us see! Light hair, very smooth; blue eyes

and clean hands,—that does not make a being at all. Try to tell me something else. Is she tall?"

"Neither tall nor short."

"Lively?"

"Neither lively nor sad."

"Intelligent?"

"About the same as other people, I think."

"Does she like study or play?"

"Neither."

"Neither one nor the other! Neither this nor that! What a compound of negatives this sister of your's must be! Well, I think I should neither like nor dislike her; she would be perfectly indifferent to me. And now the other, the little one?"

"Oh, as to her, she is just the opposite,—lively, quick, and amusing. But you must not despise Clémence, she has some very good qualities; she is mamma's right hand in domestic matters. Oh, if you only knew how beautifully nice everything is in our house! There are flowers everywhere. Our drawing-room is so pretty."

Whilst speaking thus, Eugène cast a glance around him, the meaning of which Sara had no difficulty in comprehending.

"Yes," said she. "I know that our house is badly arranged; everything is old and ugly and faded. I am quite conscious of it, I assure you. When I am in this room, it makes me so sad, that I often shut my eyes, and dream of a beautiful cottage in the country, under the blue sky of Greece or Italy,—such

a cottage as I read of in my books. It is so pleasant only to have to shut your eyes to see whatever you like. It consoles you for everything."

"But it is still more agreeable to see with the eyes open," said Eugène.

"I am not sure. Certainly what you see in imagination is more beautiful than what presents itself to the natural eye. But do give me a description of your drawing-room, and then I can picture it to myself sometimes, if I feel inclined."

"Very well. I will tell you exactly what it looks like. In the first place, there are four windows, two of which look into the court, the other two towards the orchard, the brook, the hills, and the summits of far-off mountains. Opposite to the door is a large fire-place, in which a clear fire is now burning, and lighting up one part of the drawing-room, whilst the other remains in shadow, until the lamp is brought in. In summer time, my sisters fill the fire-place with flowers and moss. Mamma is lying on the couch near the fire, with a small table covered with books and work by her side; and further on is our large table, with chairs around it. Mamma does not allow the servants to put any books or ornaments upon it—they have their own places on the brackets and shelves,—it is our own peculiar table; here we may draw, read, spread our wild-flowers to dry, or do anything we choose. Then there is a large sofa, then the piano, then ——"

"Oh, stop, stop! you will spoil my picture. It is

never necessary to enter into every minute detail in giving descriptions. I see a large fire-place, with its surroundings. That is all I need. And I see your mamma half reclining on her couch. She is rather tall, rather pale, with auburn hair, blue eyes, and such sweet manners!"

"Have you seen her, then?" asked Eugène, in astonishment.

"Yes," said Sara, laughing. "I have seen her in imagination, when Jérôme has spoken to me of her, and if you yourself were to tell me that she is different, I should not believe you. Perhaps I should not believe it, even if I saw with my own eyes that I was mistaken. There are people of whom you form certain ideas; and, do what you will, these ideas cannot be altered. Two or three times it has happened, that my eyes have seen differently from my mind; but why should they be trusted in preference? At all events, everybody has taken the right shape in my thoughts."

Eugène listened, wonderingly.

"This time you are not mistaken, at any rate," said he. "That is just like mamma; she is pale, and looks very sweet, and sometimes even a little sad; because she is always an invalid."

"I like that. I cannot bear people who have great red cheeks, like my cousin Prosper, who is so like his name. And what did you do last winter, at this time, in the twilight?"

"I often seated myself on a little footstool at mamma's feet, when she could no longer see to work

or read. I leaned my head upon her knee, and she caressed me softly whilst we chatted."

"And what did you chat about?"

"Oh, how can I tell you?—About everything. I told her all; and sometimes she spoke to me of the time when she was a little girl; about her parents, who died before I was born; or of people and things of long ago; and sometimes of what is now passing in the world. Mamma is pleased when I take interest in what interests her, and she often used to relate to me acts of courage or devotion, of which she had either read or heard. At other times, we talked of my future life, and of what I should be and do. Oh, if only I could be in my old place again, with my head on mamma's knee, listening to her voice!"

Eugène could not control the emotion caused by these vivid memories, and, although a student at the Lycée, he so far broke through conventional proprieties, as to allow a tear or two to fall; but he hastened to wipe away all trace, hoping the action was unnoticed.

"How happy you are to have such a mother!" said Sara, who never thought of making fun of him, as he had feared she might, but who, on the contrary, was drawn towards him by the warmth of affection he displayed. "I can remember mine a very little; but I was quite a tiny child when she died. My uncle is very good to me, and loves me so tenderly, that I ought not to complain; but he does not caress me. It must be very pleasant to be caressed. Poor Jérôme!

I don't think he knows much about it either. He seems sad and shut-up. I don't think he can have been loved. Is it so?—or is it his nature to be close?"

Eugène told the little girl all he knew of his cousin. He spoke of his joyless childhood, and of the ardent desire he felt to win his mother's heart by his progress and success at college.

"But she is not his own mother?" said Sara.

"He cannot remember his own mamma," replied Eugène; "so it is very natural he should wish her to love him."

"And do you think he can gain a prize?"

"I am sure I do not know. He is sadly behindhand in many ways, because no one took any trouble about him when he was at Lyons. He has a most wonderful memory, and if he can but once thoroughly understand a thing. I doubt whether he ever forgets it. The worst of it is, he has often very great difficulty in comprehending."

"And do you not help him?"

"Yes, early in the morning; but I am obliged to work myself."

"Obliged to work yourself; a fine excuse, indeed!" exclaimed Sara, vehemently; "and what will it signify, pray, if you do not gain a prize?"

"Why, of course, it would be a great disappointment to my parents."

"Your parents would not love you one whit the less, would they? And you may assure yourself, for your consolation, that if they knew the reason, they

would love you a great deal better. But as for Jérôme, the question is not whether he shall have a little more or less of joy, endearments, and praise; the question is, Shall he or shall he not be loved?"

Sara spoke with so much ardour, that she drew Eugène along with her. After a pause, she continued, in a tone of hesitation,—

"And yet it is very strange that one person should love another on account of his success. It seems to me, that the very contrary is the more rational mode, and that if the child is not really to blame, a mother ought to love him even more, because other people neither praise nor admire him. However, it seems as if the case were sometimes so, for Jérôme thinks everything depends on his success."

"If you only knew how ardently he desires it. It is his one only thought. I verily believe that disappointment will make him quite ill, if he does not attain his end."

"I wish I could help him," said Sara, as she rose to leave the room. "If I were in your place, I would leave no stone unturned, and count nothing too much for its accomplishment. Good-bye, till to-morrow; I hope you will be better then."

Eugène's eyes followed her to the door. "She has a generous heart," thought he, "beneath a very strange exterior." Then, as his head ached sadly, he leaned back in his uneasy chair, and dozed a minute or two, during which time he had the following dream:—

He saw himself in the large courtyard of the Lycée. It was beautifully adorned, and crowded with elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen, as he had heard it would be at the distribution of the prizes. The military band played, and when the joyous notes died away, a voice pronounced his name.

He tried to rise and ascend to the platform, but it was impossible; he could not move; it seemed just as if his limbs were weighted with lead, or as if some unknown agency kept him rooted to his seat. Then he saw Jérôme rise and mount the platform; and the crown was placed upon his head.

This took place several times, and he thought it very strange that Jérôme should thus appropriate what did not belong to him, just as if he were doing the most natural thing in the world. He tried to speak, but could not say a word; his tongue was no less taken captive than the rest of his body. Then, as he turned partly round to see what Jérôme would do next, he observed that his mother was seated by his side, though he had not perceived her before. She looked at him with great tenderness, and exclaimed, "I am quite satisfied." This word of commendation sounded so sweetly in his heart, that he awoke, asking himself "What could have happened"; and had no rest until he had gathered up the broken fragments of his dream, and disengaged them from the mists in which they floated on his awakening.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SACRIFICE.

Winter was come in all its rigour. It was no longer by a slight effort of the will that the boys could rise at five o'clock in the morning, to study in an icy-cold room. Jérôme had to wage a short but desperate warfare every day with his old enemy, Sloth, resuscitated by the frost. But Eugène, naturally of a more lively temperament, had no mercy, and dragged him out of his comfortable bed on to the cold flagged floor, the third time of calling. Eugène was rather cross sometimes, and compared himself to Buffon's servant, whom his master paid to force him to rise, whether he stormed or not. When the victory was won, their eyes thoroughly opened, and the candle sufficiently bright to throw a somewhat less obscure light upon the page, the two boys, wrapped in their blankets, and nestling close together, for more warmth, began to study in good earnest.

Eugène was quite right in saying that Jérôme was rather dull of comprehension; but if he was slow, he was sure, and having a tenacious memory, what he

had once learnt was thoroughly acquired. It was more difficult for him to study alone than for many boys, because he never guessed at anything. Eugène, on the contrary, seized things easily; he might be almost said to know some things intuitively, but all that was connected with grammatical rules and subtleties, very soon slipped out of his memory, and when he had once managed to imbue the mind of his cousin with some abstruse portion of the Greek or Latin syntax, the tables were not unfrequently turned, and Jérôme recalled to his young master the lesson he had been at so much pains to teach him. Thus, there was a system of exchange organized between the boys, which was not altogether without its utility to Eugène; although the advantage he derived from it could not be of immediate and visible service.

As Jérôme rose in his class with slow but sure steps, Eugène lost his footing. His masters were astonished; they had hoped better things of him. At length, in the month of February, Jérôme attained to an equal standing with his cousin; indeed, he sometimes even surpassed him, because his attention having been forcibly chained to the subject in hand, he contrived to avoid faults of carelessness.

It was about this time that the postman, that wonderful dispenser of joys and sorrows, left a letter at the door one day, for Jean Paul. He opened it, without having the slightest idea as to what might be its contents, and remained petrified. His father,

whom he had left strong, well, and still in the very prime of manhood, was dead! A few days' illness had snatched him from his family. His mother wrote herself. It was a short letter, and only contained a simple account of the event, penned with a trembling hand; but this very simplicity was affecting. It clearly showed that grief was no stranger to the writer, and that she had schooled her heart to its reception even in this most crushing stroke. Jean Paul locked his door, seated himself at the foot of the bed, and tried to realize the truth of what he had just read. He could not believe these words, "He died last evening," had any real signification. He read them again and again, and could not credit them. Suddenly he took out his pocket book, opened it, and saw the last letter he had received from his father's hand. His heart was ready to break as the consciousness broke upon him, that the hand which had traced those lines was cold in death; that the heart which had dictated them beat no longer; and that it was indeed true he had now no father. He pressed the letter to his lips and knelt down, but no words were audible, through his heaving sobs, save these only—"My mother, my poor mother!"

He remained for a considerable time in that stupor, which follows, as a natural consequence, upon the descent of an unlooked-for and terrible blow such as that under which he was then bowed. By slow degrees his ideas became clearer. What would

become of his mother and the children? "I am the eldest," said he; "the only one old enough to help my mother. But what can I do?—my studies are but just commenced."

At that moment his eyes fell on the letter which he still held in his hand, and he read these words, "Always do your duty, my boy, and don't be anxious for the rest. God requires nothing of thee but what thou art able to perform. Of what thou canst not do, He will Himself take charge."

This was written in reply to a letter couched in a strain of deep discouragement, when his troubles were at their height with his ungovernable little troop. Was it not also in reply to his thoughts at the present moment. His father's voice spoke to him a second time. He arose from his knees feeling more calm, and comprehending that he had been strengthened to make a great sacrifice.

Jean Paul was of the number of those who possess, in an eminent degree, the courage of self-sacrifice. The little acts of renunciation that marked his every-day life, had induced a very humble opinion of himself. It seemed quite a thing, of course, that he should take his part in the common heritage of suffering. So he seated himself, and wrote as short and simple a letter to his mother, as was that he had just received; saying, that he hoped to be with her on the morrow.

Whilst this was passing in the student's chamber, M. Bertin had entered the library, where Sara was

employed with her lessons, in a very joyous frame of mind, rubbing his hands, as was his wont when under excitement.

"Good news!" he exclaimed. "Our Jean Paul is on the sure road—not to fortune—I doubt he cares but little for that; but to science. One of the German literati whom I saw the other day, and to whom I spoke of his extraordinary endowments, and of his ardent love of study, has offered to take him with him, first into his own country, where Jean Paul will study for two years, under his direction; afterwards on a grand tour that he proposes making in the East, as envoy of some prince or other, who takes an interest in science. Seldom does such a rare opportunity occur in a man's experience. All his expenses will be defrayed, and, no doubt, a splendid career opened before him. "Oh, I am so glad! I am so very glad!" cried Sara, getting up and jumping round her uncle. "You must tell him directly; and if such a piece of news as this does not rouse him up a little, why, I shall be really angry, I can promise him."

At this moment, there was a knock at the door, which was quickly opened; it was Jean Paul himself who entered, but so pale, that the words died upon Sara's lips.

"What can be the matter?" she asked.

"My father is dead," replied the young man, in a scarcely audible voice; though he evidently spoke with a strong effort.

M. Bertin took the poor boy's hand, made him sit down, and expressed for him the tenderest sympathy. He asked a few questions, to which Jean Paul had some difficulty in replying; his information was so very slender, and added—

"We will do all that lies in our power to console you a little, my poor boy. You must often talk with us of this good father, whom I have learnt to respect since I knew you intimately; for he has educated you in the love of truth and duty."

"But I must leave you, sir," replied Jean Paul, with firmness. "I must now return to my mother."

"Are you serious!" cried M. Bertin—"and your studies! Does your mother really ask you to return?"

"No, sir, she says nothing about it; but she must certainly wish it, because she has only me and my sister Julie to help her. I think it is my duty to go."

These last words were uttered in a low voice, and without the least idea of impressing his friends with the notion that the sacrifice was in the least meritorious.

"But what do you think of doing for her?" enquired the old professor, who did not exactly see the connection between Jean Paul's literary and scientific pursuits, and necessary aid for his mother in her trying and difficult circumstances.

"I will work!"

"No doubt you will; but at your age no one will employ you!"

"Oh yes! I shall perhaps find some private

pupils. My poor father had several. Those who knew him, and who can testify to the conscientious manner in which he discharged his duty, will, I hope, kindly interest themselves in me, and my sister Julie will bear her part of the burden. We shall live in a very humble manner; but I think we shall be able to make a living. My mother is so clever in turning every little thing to good account."

"Must we tell him?" whispered M. Bertin to his niece.

"Yes, Uncle, tell him everything," said the little girl, in the same low tone. Her eyes were full of tears and brilliant with feeling.

M. Bertin had had his doubts whether it would be better that the youth should go his way unassailed by temptation, and allowed to accomplish his resolution without dreaming of the extent of the required sacrifice. But like Sara, he soon saw he had not the right to lessen the virtue of his resolve; and besides, he rather wished to prove him to the last extremity.

"Let me at least beg that you will wait, my dear young friend, until you have given a candid hearing to a proposition I have now to lay before you. Perhaps your decision may not be irrevocable."

M. Bertin then repeated what he had just announced to Sara, and dwelt upon the advantages it afforded for the future. Jean Paul's colour rose, and his eyes assumed for a moment an unwonted brilliancy; but it was merely a transitory emotion, and before he could reply, the bright hue had faded

from his cheek, and his countenance resumed the appearance of depression.

"Had my father lived, it would have been the greatest happiness that could have occurred to me; but now, I cannot leave my mother!"

"But reflect, I pray you; how very little you will be able to do for her, if you at once enter upon the path you propose. You will have but misery to share with her; and on the other hand if you become a learned man, a Professor, or what not—celebrated perhaps—you would eventually be able to share your prosperity together."

Jean Paul made no reply. He appeared agitated. Sara looked at him in visible anxiety, but he thought not of her.

"Perhaps I may be wrong, but I cannot help it. The future is not mine, the present is."

M. Bertin was again about to speak when Sara hastily stopped him.

"Enough, Uncle, enough! For pity's sake do not torment him any longer. Don't you see that my uncle thinks the same as you do," said she turning to Jean Paul and clasping his hand with both her own. "You are a noble-hearted fellow, and God will bless you. I am certain you will never regret what you are doing now."

"Sara is right," continued M. Bertin, shaking the hand of his beloved pupil. "I cannot renounce the brilliant future which seemed to be opening before you without pain; but you have chosen the good

part, my boy, the part of duty and of conscience. I quite approve your decision. It is well!"

It is well! The highest term of praise that ever fell from the old professor's lips. No one had ever been known to receive from him a more flattering eulogium; but pronounced by him, these simple words were felt to possess a depth of meaning — a great price — and those who knew him intimately could desire no more. So Jean Paul went to his home, where the chief place was now vacant. Great trouble was upon them all; but no one lost their courage. Madame Hermann accepted her son's sacrifice in all simplicity. When he communicated his resolution to her, she merely said:—

"Thy father would have done the same."

They remained together therefore. Julie devoted several hours of each day to the undisciplined children of one of the families in the town, for the modest remuneration of twenty francs a month; Jean Paul soon found a few private pupils, thanks to the interest excited for the bereaved family, and he could still devote a portion of the day, and some hours of the night, to his beloved studies. His mother was untiring in her exertions, and found a thousand ingenious ways of economizing the money brought to her by her children, that precious money which they had earned by the sweat of their brow. The little ones went to school, and rendered many useful but trifling services on their return, according to

their several capacity. The youngest could of course do no more than amuse the household by its chattering and joyous laughter. And yet, in the midst of such ceaseless activity, the sweet satisfying sense of accomplished duty, and the cheering influence of home affections, the shadow of death which had fallen upon the humble dwelling, was still there. The bravest hearts are ever the most faithful.

Jean Paul never spoke to a single creature of the sacrifice he had made in abandoning the bright career which had opened before him.

He had thought it best not to mention the proposition, even to his mother, for he knew that, although she was utterly unable to comprehend the extent of the sacrifice he had made, she yet felt deeply his being obliged to renounce a more brilliant position for an obscure existence, and a very modest, though honourable, livelihood. He was too sincerely submissive to the will of God, and too seriously devoted to his mother, ever to regret his resolution for a single moment; yet we should evince but slight knowledge of the human heart, did we conclude that the struggle ceased when the decision was accomplished.

There must be continuous struggle,—a daily conflict; but, if we wage the war valorously, our strength will sensibly augment, whilst that of our enemy will as certainly diminish. Sometimes in the evening when the family was gathered around the little lamp which had to serve for all,

when the little ones had retired to rest, and the anxious mother bent over her needle, which plied its weary way with ceaseless monotony of sound, whilst she turned over in her mind some difficult problem of economy--whilst Julie asked herself what plan she could devise to captivate the attention of her insubordinate pupils on the morrow—sometimes then our poor young friend would close his eyes and dream—of what? Neither of the past nor of the present, but of what might have been. In the first place, Germany presented herself to his view, as if seen through a light mist. Germany, the land of science and deep thought, of old collegiate cities, of grave profound doctors, who are for ever poring over the secrets of the human soul, or those of nature. And there he might have lived for two whole years! And after that, the East would have opened to him her golden gates. He would have visited the abodes of the ancients—have seen the ground once trodden by men who lived in the earliest ages, whose language and life he so loved to study. He would have been able to trace their footsteps; to read inscriptions that their hands had carved—hands which had been for thousands of years motionless in the grave. He might have drunk deeply into the past, and enriched himself with a plenteous harvest of knowledge, a rich store of ideas to communicate on his return to those who, less happy, could only receive them through intermediate aid.

All these visions passed before him, and when he again sought to fix his attention upon his book, its pages seemed to have lost their accustomed interest. He was sad, and in danger of losing courage for the arduous and ill-requited labours of the morrow. At length, his mother looking anxiously at him, would say—

"What is the matter, my boy? You are tired; you have been working too hard. Leave your book, and go to rest." More than once these words had caused him a slight feeling of impatience. Could not his mother understand? Could she not guess? But when he met her anxious gaze, and observed the anxiety and fatigue upon her features, he was angry with himself that he had wasted a thought upon his own private griefs, when all his strength was required to carry the common burden.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A HAPPY FAULT.

School-life was not in all respects just what Arthur had expected to find it. He soon became aware that his companions cared very little about his fancied superiority. In the little world called "school," the means of success are not quite similar to those of the world without its boundaries: it is more difficult to dazzle children than men. In order to gain any great ascendancy over them, honesty of purpose is necessary—the firmness and decision of an upright, energetic, and enterprising character, or at least an intellectual superiority wholly incontestable; and they are less easily won by the intellect than by the heart.

Arthur had nothing of all this; so he occupied but an inferior position amongst the young gentlemen of M. Bertin's establishment, was very small in fact, and his self-esteem suffered most cruelly in consequence. At first he thought he should not trouble himself much with study; but, when he found how lightly he was esteemed, he remembered to have heard it said, that he was remarkably gifted. His

masters had always spoken to his grandmamma of the extreme facility with which he acquired knowledge; complaining only that her extreme fondness was frequently a hindrance to his progress.

He resolved now to call his talents into requisition; and supposed nothing would be more easy than to secure by the aid of such gifts as his, that supremacy to which he had always been accustomed hitherto, because no one had yet disputed it with him. But it was less easy than he had supposed; he soon became aware that he had a very formidable competitor in Eugène, and that Jérôme himself, heavy and timid as he was, had, by untiring industry and resolution, already far outstripped him. Arthur was not disposed to engage in a struggle, the issue of which, notwithstanding the good opinion he entertained of his abilities, he yet considered doubtful. He assured himself, over and over again, that he did not care in the least for a prize, and that he would ten times rather leave at the very commencement of the vacation than stay to see who were the successful competitors.

He really was, secretly, extremely vexed, to find that Arthur d'Ermance did not hold the place which he would fain have occupied. So he began to think of the château, of his grandmother, of his pony, and of his conversations with Benedict, as of a sort of Paradise lost.

He persuaded himself that he had too tender a heart to bear this prolonged absence; and, after

three or four days spent in this frame of mind, he wrote a letter to his grandmamma, which disturbed her exceedingly, because she thought it the expression of a sad, down-cast, home-sick heart, and she wrote forthwith to M. Bertin, to know if the health of the poor unhappy boy was not giving way, and whether it would not be a suitable time to relax the severity of his studies.

One day, after their return from college, Arthur went up to Robert, who was amusing himself to his apparent satisfaction by drawing a magnificent ship of war, that he meant to enclose in a letter to his little sister Isabelle.

"What is your place in Greek translation?" he enquired.

"You know very well," replied Robert. "I am thirty-first."

"And your brother?"

"Third."

"And Jérôme has been first; it is wonderful!"

"Yes," said Robert. "I am quite satisfied: poor Jérôme has worked so hard that he deserves to succeed."

"And you are contented with your own place?"

"What would you have? I must needs be. I have no memory; when I have learnt a thing it goes clean out of my head again directly. I am sure I have worked harder here than I did at home: I can do no more. Mamma always tells me that what she requires is, that I shall do my duty—not that I

shall succeed; so that, if I can conscientiously say I have not been thoughtless and idle, she will not be displeased with me. I ought to be a sailor, I know I ought; that is my vocation. I might have had a chance of becoming something on the sea, but on *terra firma* I shall never be a distinguished personage. Well, never mind; I don't care; I have taken for my motto—

'*Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra,*'"

"You are always the hero!" said Arthur; my motto is—

'*Fais ce que veux, advienne que pourra.*'"

"As to that, I think it will be rather difficult," said Eugène, now approaching. "Who is there in this world who does what he most wishes to do?"

"Why, many people; amongst others, my uncle Gérard, who is always travelling about. What an amusing life that must be! I will do the same when I grow up. I should amazingly like to see everything.

'*Voir, c'est avoir,*
Et tout voir, c'est tout conquérir.'

"My uncle often says this. But I shall not travel just in the same way; for he has been a walking tour through the whole of Switzerland. I shall have my carriage and servant."

"And, no doubt, you will enjoy it far less than he has done," said Robert; "for I have often heard that those who travel the most simply have the largest share of enjoyment."

"That is according to taste," replied Arthur, as he turned over in his pocket the money with which his grandmamma kept him liberally supplied.

This money, which never failed him, was often a source of temptation. The young gentlemen at M. Bertin's were not allowed to go out alone during the week-days, but their friends at the Lycée willingly undertook to make Arthur's purchases, charging him, of course, with a small commission. Sometimes it was tarts and sweatmeats, sometimes novels,—all things equally forbidden in the school, but none the less ardently coveted by Arthur. He frequently returned home with his pockets full of sweetmeats or trashy publications, which were carefully put by in his wardrobe, to be made use of in secret. Robert's presence in the room greatly discomforted him; more than once he had tried to purchase his silence at the cost of a part of his secret hoard; but Robert would never accept the bribe, and openly blamed Arthur for thus trying to evade the watchful care of his master.

One Saturday evening, as the boys returned from college, under the care of M. Prosper, who walked on in front, a poor woman who stood in the shadow of an angle of the wall stopped them with a look of entreaty. She neither spoke a word, nor extended her hand, but her expression bespoke her misery more indisputably than many words could have done. She had a child, a few months old, in her arms, and a remarkably pretty little girl of five

or six years old walked by her side, but she was so pale and thin, that it made one's heart ache to look at her. The poor mother seemed ready to sink. Eugène was much struck by her sad expression; he stopped, put his hand in his pocket, drew out all that he had, and gave it to her. It was a mere trifle, enough, however, to buy bread for herself and her children. He was rushing away, when a sudden thought crossed his mind. He left his place, and ran back to the unfortunate woman, who did not seem to have strength to leave the spot, and said to her, hurriedly:—

"Give me your name and address."

Surprised at this demand, she appeared to hesitate, then gave it reluctantly. It was a Polish name, and Eugène could scarcely make it out; so having deposited his books on the footpath, at the foot of the wall, he drew out his pocket-book and wrote from her dictation. All this was not done in an instant, and M. Prosper had discovered his absence. When at length he arrived, out of breath with running, he was received with a severe reprimand. M. Prosper declared that he should be kept in the next day for having left the ranks. Eugène attempted no excuse; he well knew that a breach of discipline was unpardonable.

Next day, thanks to the punishment inflicted by M. Prosper, he found himself alone in the garden with Sara in the afternoon, a few rays from the winter sun having drawn them both thither.

Sara asked the cause of his punishment, and listened with extreme interest to the history of his encounter, and the feelings of pity it had awakened.

"You did right," said she, "and I recognize my cousin Prosper to the life. It is just like him to punish you for a feeling of sympathy. If he only could change the whole host of humanity into a collection of automata, nothing would be wanting to his happiness; but as he cannot, he is obliged to console himself by punishing those who are guilty of spontaneous actions. But you have the poor woman's address,—do show it me."

"Here it is," said Eugène, turning over the contents of his pocket-book. "What a barbarous name! —Kociuleszinska. I wrote it at her dictation, letter by letter, otherwise I should think there was some mistake."

"Walnut-street," said Sara, looking at the address. "It is not very far from here. Can you guess what I intend to do, Eugène? I will talk to her myself, and try to gain her confidence. Madame Germain shall take me to see her;—she shall tell me her whole history, and then we will see what we can do to comfort her."

It was an excellent plan, and Eugène agreed to it with all his heart. He only regretted that he, too, could not accompany Sara.

The little girl was not one to be satisfied with good intentions only. With her, action almost immediately followed thought. In five minutes she had put on

her bonnet in some fashion, thrown her mantle over her shoulders, and drawn on her gloves, through the holes of which her fingers were, alas! too often visible; then she started with Madame Germain. The good lady was not, it must be confessed, much pleased with this errand; she was thrown by it quite out of her accustomed routine, but the child's impetuous eloquence had been more than she could resist.

"What folly are you making me commit now?" exclaimed she, as she trotted after Sara. "No doubt the woman gave a false address; these miserable wretches always do. They deceive everyone who is stupid enough to be taken in by their silly make-believe desperation. You will see, we shall no more find Poles there than in my head at this moment. I know all about that, I do. I have had a little more experience of the world than you have, Miss Sara: people don't take me in quite so easily."

"I would rather be deceived a hundred times than run the risk of leaving a poor creature in the streets whom we could save," said Sara. "And what is the good of accusing her beforehand."

They had now reached the house indicated by the woman. Sara made enquiries of the porter, who was sitting before the door. Yes, they were right. Madame Kociuleszinska lived at No. 8, Seventh Corridor, to the right of the seventh story. Seventh story! Madame Germain longed to know, when she arrived panting for breath, up the fifth flight of stairs, how

ever human creatures could live at such an unnatural elevation. When she reached the goal she was obliged to stop at least five minutes to recover her breath; her impatient young lady had already discovered No. 8, in a wondrous labyrinth of corridors, when at last she felt able to rejoin her.

A gentle voice said—"Come in." She opened the door, and a sadder sight than she had ever looked to see, presented itself before her. A man, once of a fine figure and noble countenance, sat near the fire wrapped in an old blanket, which was insufficient to prevent his emaciated limbs shuddering with the chilliness of fever.

The little girl, with light hair and dark blue eyes, described by Eugène, was stretched upon the bed, pale and motionless. The mother, holding her baby in her arms, knelt upon the hearth, endeavouring to re-kindle some dying fuel. It was, indeed, the same whom Eugène had so pitied. Grief and misery had withered the bloom upon her cheek, though she was yet young; but it was easy to see that, for herself alone she would not have wrung her hands, and that it was only the sufferings of those she loved that had reconciled her to receive the gift of charity. She rose up, with a look of surprise, on seeing her visitors.

"Poor little thing," said Sara, as she looked at the sick child. "What is the matter with her?"

"She is weak," said the mother; "she wasted away without any other disease than misery. I have

not been able to take her out to-day; she had not strength for it. It is hard not to have bread to give one's children. She would have had nothing to eat for two days, if a young gentleman who passed us yesterday, had not guessed at our misery, for I dared not hold out my hand."

"It is he who has spoken to me of you," said Sara, with vivacity. "You gave him your address, did you not?"

"Yes; and I shrunk very much from doing so, at the very moment when I had received the gift of charity for the first time."

Her countenance changed as she said these words.

"It was for your children's sake," suggested Sara. It was the very best thing she could possibly have said.

"Yes," said the young mother, as she raised her head; "it was for them; no one can blame me!"

She looked at her husband with a mixture of fear and resolution. He turned away his head, but said nothing.

"We have been without the necessaries of life for several months," she continued; "my husband used to give lessons, and earn something for the children's food. But when sickness came we had no resource."

"I can do nothing more for them," said the invalid, in a fit of coughing, which nearly choked him.

"It is God's will," replied his wife, when he became a little calmer.

The tears were in Sara's eyes; she rose and em-

braced the little girl, who smiled feebly upon her, as she slipped a five-franc piece—it was all she possessed—into the little firmly clasped hand, and went away.

When she had descended the seven stories, and passed by the porter, who looked at her with evident curiosity, she said to Madame Germain:

"I should think that now you are for once cured of your mania of suspicion;" and she launched out in warm praises of her new friends.

Arrived at home, Sara ran into the drawing-room where, as she hoped, she found Eugène. She drew a poetical picture of the exiles' home. The beautiful pale countenance, and noble bearing of the invalid—the charming delicate features of the child, dying of hunger—the sad dignity of the mother, clad in her robe of poverty—nothing was forgotten which could awaken interest, sympathy, and compassion.

Eugène caught her ardour, and they formed many a plan for aiding this unfortunate family. At length it was decided that a collection should be raised amongst the boys, and that Sara should return on the following day to carry the proceeds of it to the Poles.

This union of sentiment and interests had already formed a strong link between the two young people. Eugène could scarcely believe Sara to be the same girl who had made such an unfavourable impression on his mind, during the early days of their acquaintance; he now felt himself irresistibly drawn towards her by her simplicity and warm-heartedness. On her

part, Sara admired in him a delicacy of feeling, and an almost feminine gentleness, which were the more pleasing because so rarely encountered. When their plans had been duly weighed, and so many marvels wrought with the products of the collection, that you would have thought the donors were to be millionnaires, instead of young Lycéens, who with the single exception of Arthur, only received the modest allowance of five-pence per week, Eugène remarked, with a little growl of satisfaction—

"And it is to my disobedience that we owe the discovery of this poor family; for I knew quite well that M. Prosper had absolutely forbidden any one to leave the ranks."

"*Felix culpa*!" exclaimed Sara, laughing. "I wish all your faults may be as innocent, and lead to as happy a result."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE COLLECTION.

The amount gained by the collection was not so large as Eugène and Sara had expected it to realize. Some of the donors had plenty of good will, but little money; and with others the case was exactly reversed. Eugène was numbered amongst the first; he had given all the money he possessed the evening before. When M. Bertin became aware of their project—which by the way he cordially approved—he suggested that a subscription-list should be drawn out, headed with a pathetic description of the case.

"What will be the use of that," enquired Sara, who always liked to go straight to the point, and in general troubled herself but little with accessaries.

"I speak advisedly," replied her uncle; "in general I am not at all fond of petitions, but in the present case I think it is allowable to make use of one."

So Sara wrote the rough sketch, and Eugène copied it in his best style upon a large sheet of paper. A stirring appeal was made to the pupils' generosity,

irresistible for those who possessed any heart at all. Some of the names did not figure in the list at all—names of those whose hands had vainly turned their pockets inside out, as if in hope of discovering some miraculous hoard, for they must have known but too well their actual poverty; so their hands, finding no treasure, had to renounce the honour of writing their names in the beautifully prepared sheet, ruled so carefully by Eugène without a single blot; we cannot say who was the most disappointed, he who had nothing to give, or he who had nothing to receive.

When Arthur's turn came, M. Bertin's wisdom was fully justified. Had a simple demand been made upon him, he would certainly only have given the smallest sum possible, for he had never learnt to feel any interest in suffering. And, although he had never given expression to his opinion, he held that some were come into this world to enjoy all the blessings of fortune, and others to suffer the privations of poverty. But when Arthur saw this sheet so nearly blank, and thought of the figure his name would cut, he decided to make a little sacrifice to his self-esteem. A new gold ten franc piece remained in his purse, part of his grandmother's last remittance. He took it out with a gesture of affected indifference, placed it upon the table, and seized the pen to write his name.

"Arthur," exclaimed Eugène, with some hesitation, "if you will lend me five francs, I will pay you

by degrees, as I receive my allowance. You would render me a great service, for I have nothing to give."

"No, I cannot," said Arthur, "I have nothing to lend you."

"And are you, then, going to give these ten francs?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"Well! but if you could have lent me even two of them, you would still have given a large sum, and I could then have added my name to the list."

"I shall only put down a round sum," said Arthur, "what does it matter to me whether your name is upon the list or not."

As he spoke, he took the pen and wrote his name in his best fashion, surrounding it with a noble flourish, and then inscribed the sum of ten francs, under a modest subscription of twopence halfpenny which looked overwhelmed by its very imposing neighbour.

The list, when completed, was carried by Eugène to Sara in the study.

"Twenty-three francs fifty centimes," exclaimed the young lady; "that is very nice! Oh, but what is this I see? Arthur d'Ermance, ten francs! How generous! I don't wonder that his name should cut such a splendid figure amongst the others."

M. Bertin smiled, as he listened to these observations.

"Ah," said she, surprising him in the act, "that explains your advice, uncle. Whoever would have

given you credit for such profound penetration. Well, the poor boy has fallen with all his heart into the trap; so much the better for our Poles, but I never should have been clever enough to hit upon this contrivance."

"I have had more experience of the human heart than you," replied M. Bertin, "but I am rather sorry to have laid the trap for Arthur; I only wanted to give him a useful lesson. You can go back to your class, Eugène, and send him to me."

Arthur found M. Bertin alone. He had a few directions to give him about his studies, and then taking up the list which Sara had left on the table—

"You have shown great generosity, Arthur," remarked M. Bertin, "but I am afraid the desire to appear liberal, or perhaps to show that you have more money at your command than the other boys, has had some influence upon your charity."

Arthur blushed, to the very roots of his hair, at M. Bertin's penetration, but said nothing.

"Well, well, my child," kindly added the professor, "you may go; only remember, another time when you give to the poor, that your left hand must not know what your right hand doeth, and that the opinions of others must not be allowed to influence your charity."

Eugène might also have profited by a similar lesson—for the humiliation of not being able to add his name to the list of contributors was almost equal to his sorrow at having nothing to give. Sara,

too, had nothing, but she did not care a straw about that, as she had somebody's money to carry to the poor family. As soon as Madame Germain could go, she set off, running rather than walking, and was obliged to wait constantly for the arrival of her respectable companion, who could not possibly travel at such an extraordinary pace. Madame Germain was in reality a very good sort of person whose only fault was inclination to suspicion of evil, which said defect became a positive good quality in her position, as it constantly saved her from being imposed upon. She had been really touched by the unfortunate position of these Poles, and wished for nothing better than to be of some use to them. She felt herself quite the right person to assist Sara, or rather to direct her in this good work—restrain her wild impetuosity, and substitute some of her wise decisions, and practical good sense, for the too ambitious projects of the child.

Alas! poor Sara had indeed to learn, that but a very limited store of articles can be purchased for the sum of twenty-three francs fifty centimes.

After conversing for about a quarter of an hour with the poor woman, the treasure she had thought inexhaustible assumed very limited proportions. So many things were required! The little girl had no bed, the father no flannel waistcoat, the mother neither gown nor linen, and the little child was but barely covered with the clothing she

formed from her own most scanty wardrobe. Fuel was wanted, and bread, and light nourishing food for the two invalids, who seemed already a little revived by a few basins of broth which Sara's bounty had provided.

And there was the rent to pay! Only twenty-three francs for all that! It was gratefully received notwithstanding. It would at least furnish bread and lodging for many days to come.

"Ah, Miss," said the young woman, with tears in her eyes, "if my husband could only get well, and give lessons, we should be quite happy. It is only work we want."

A sudden idea crossed Sara's mind. She could not speak of it to any one before she had consulted her uncle; but the brilliant smile with which she told the poor people to be of good courage, left a ray of hope and joy in their humble home. Half an hour afterward Sara was very busy in her little chamber. She was routing through the stores in a wardrobe to which Madame Germain consigned worn-out garments, and had certainly found some real treasures—dresses, stockings, of her own, outgrown, and lots of old linen, part of which, if skilfully selected, could very well be used. Sara spread all these things over her bed, and regarded them in great perplexity. What was she to do? Nothing seemed suitable for her poor friends. Everything was either too small for the woman or too large for the child. As for the baby, perhaps she did not quite know what sort of

clothes were needful to wrap up such tiny creatures. Ah, if she only knew how to cut out, and sew, and mend all these things, she would soon clothe that poor little shivering child in something warmer than its old print frock! But Sara did not know how to do anything, not even to hem a handkerchief respectably, so, after having gazed for some time upon her useless treasures, she uttered the exclamation—

"Miserable Greek, and miserable Latin. I would far rather know how to make a shirt than be able to say I have read the Iliad."

"Who can be speaking thus?" exclaimed a voice, with comical emphasis. "What is it you, Sara; do you talk in this way? But what an exhibition! What a chaos! I am not surprised that I called three times, without your hearing me."

"Well, really, uncle; however it may scandalize you, I could repeat what I have just said a thousand times over. I would give all you have taught me to be able to make a shirt; that knowledge would be of much more use to me now."

"But it might be well to know both," replied M. Bertin, "and the art is really not so difficult as you suppose. Could not Madame Germain give you some idea how to set about it?"

"She is busy at present; and besides, she has often tried to teach me to sew, and I never could learn, she has such intolerably patronizing airs, and says, shaking her head at me, 'Ah, Mademoiselle Sara,

if you would only have listened to me, you would have known how to sew by this time! I told you you would repent it!' I cannot endure that phrase 'I told you.' Poor Madame Germain has repeated it so often. She puts me quite out of patience."

Sara remained till quite evening, shut up in her room, turning the old garments and pieces over and over; she tried to cut out a little frock, but succeeded so badly, that she let fall her scissors, and was very much inclined to have a good cry.

There was nothing for it but to accept the conviction of her thorough incapacity; so she threw the things all back into the wardrobe pell-mell, and ran down to calm her agitation in the garden. Going along the corridor she met Eugène, to whom she gave the history of her defeat.

"What a pity that my sister Clémence is not here," said he, "she is so very clever in this sort of thing. She would soon put you in the way of making them as well as she can herself."

"I should be so glad!" said Sara, humbly and sorrowfully; "but it is of no use to wish for impossibilities." She then ran away into the garden, where the cool March breezes soon refreshed her throbbing temples.

Whilst the little girl had been thus occupied with useless regrets and wishes, her uncle had been busying himself in a very quiet manner, and without mentioning his scheme to anybody, for the effectual help of the unfortunate Poles. He had made

inquiries, and ascertained that the man was very worthy, and had always supported his family honourably, until sickness rendered it impossible. He had even pushed his scruples of delicacy so far, that his wife had gone out without his permission, to beg the bread which had saved the child's life.

M. Bertin sent one of his friends, a medical man, to see them, who reported that there was nothing to be alarmed at, and that in a few days, if he was well nursed, he would, he hoped, be in a state to resume his drawing lessons, provided pupils could be found for him.

"And this will really," continued the doctor, "be the very best medicine he could have; for inaction is wearing him away; a little fatigue would be a much less evil."

There only remained to discover, then, what was his merit as an artist.

Once assured that his pupils would be gainers by the change, M. Bertin resolved to give him the place of a professor with whom he was not at all satisfied; and thus Sara's ardent wishes were realized.

There was one important consideration to take into account. M. Bertin did not choose, in admitting the exile into his establishment, that he should be subjected to the slightest humiliation.

He sent for Eugène, and desired that neither he nor Sara would drop the slightest hint which should lead the boys to suppose that the drawing-master,

M. Kociuleszinska was the same person for whom the collection had been made. Eugène dared not mention that he had already told his brother and Arthur the name of the Pole. The fear of being blamed for indiscretion, which was, however, quite pardonable, as he had never dreamed that there could be any motive for silence, made him forget the horror of dissimulation, with which his first falsehood had inspired him, and he promised to keep the secret, saying to himself that he would exact like silence from his friends.

This fault, which he afterwards bitterly repented, occasioned trouble.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Confession.

Robert would not have caused pain for anything in the world, and especially to an unfortunate individual, whose sorrows had won for him an especial claim to respectful sympathy. So Eugène was sure of his brother, but he could not feel the same confidence in Arthur, who, without being precisely unkind by nature, had been so little accustomed to place himself in the position of others, that he did not calculate the effect of his jokes upon their feelings, and sought only his own private amusement.

His talent for caricature was a weapon which he was fond of using, and it inflicted many an unsuspected wound upon its victims. M. Kociuleszinska's *début* was made in a costume which, notwithstanding the wonders wrought upon it by his young wife's industry, yet betrayed his exceeding poverty. The frock coat was mended in several places, and when, forgetting that great caution was necessary, he stretched his arm rather too quickly across the table, to take a drawing that was handed to him, the poor sleeve, worn to the very threads, gave way to

such a degree, that further efforts at reparation would be obviously in vain. Arthur set to work to sketch the professor in this critical moment. The rents in the poor garment were represented with most scrupulous fidelity; he held his hat in one hand, and seemed to be holding it out towards his pupils; in the other was a paper, on which might be read, in very small, yet clear characters, "*List of subscriptions,*" and below, "*for mending the holes, if you please.*"

This caricature was not even witty; it was nothing, in fact, but unmitigated naughtiness. It was passed on to Eugène, and he was about to tear it into a hundred pieces, in excessive disgust and indignation, when a hand suddenly arrested him. It was M. Kociuleszinska himself.

"Who did that?" he inquired. He was very pale, but calm.

"I did not do it, sir, indeed," said Eugène, earnestly.

"I believe you," said the Pole, when he had looked at him attentively. "He who has had the baseness to do it, can surely scarcely be so cowardly as to let the blame fall upon the innocent!"

Nobody spoke. Arthur felt a weight upon his heart, but succeeded in schooling his countenance.

"There is one amongst you, gentlemen, whom I deliver up to the tribunal of his own conscience," continued the professor. "I have known unhappiness many times during my life, but I rarely have

felt it so cruelly as when my eyes fell upon this unworthy production. It is a weakness, I own; for I certainly am neither better nor worse for having been obliged to accept charity at a time when it was utterly impossible for me to work. On him only the contempt really falls, who takes advantage of such a necessity to insult me!"

There was a kind of solemnity in the tone, induced by the strong emotion which he felt. The boys were struck with consternation. The remainder of the lesson passed in complete silence; and when it was over, the boys rose and took leave of their professor in a much more reverential manner than they were accustomed to exhibit.

In the evening, M. Bertin sent for Arthur into his study. His manner was cold and severe.

"Are you the author of this infamous production?" said he, sternly, pointing to the caricature, which lay upon the table.

Arthur held down his head; for the first time in his whole life he felt ashamed of himself.

"I have nothing more to say to you, sir! If your heart does not make itself heard, I should try in vain to convince you of the cowardly wickedness of such an action. Here are the ten francs you gave as your subscription; take them back; you are not worthy of the honour of assisting the unfortunate!"

Arthur dared not refuse to take it; but it seemed as if the gold coin would burn his hand. He richly deserved the humiliation.

"One instant!" said M. Bertin as he went out. "M. Kociuleszinska does not know that you are the author of this caricature. I shall not betray you; and I do not suppose that your companions will do so either."

Arthur's hand was on the handle of the door; he hesitated a moment, then turned round and exclaimed passionately:—

"I heartily wish I had never come!"

"Poor child!" said M. Bertin in a tone so different from that in which he had last spoken, that Arthur was as it were transfixed.

He was half inclined to return, confess his fault and his penitence, and implore forgiveness, and aid, to overcome his evil disposition; but pride restrained him. He went out and shut the door behind him.

Eight days passed by. Arthur had spent the time in great trouble of mind, which he did his best to conceal from others, and to dissimulate, if it were possible, from himself. It was a violent death-struggle between pride and repentance.

The day for the drawing-lesson had returned, the dreaded hour arrived, but M. Kociuleszinska did not make his appearance.

At last,—the bell. Yes, it is he; he enters the class-room. He was pale, much paler than usual; his movements were constrained, and his lips trembled in spite of all his efforts to appear calm. He passed along the ranks, distributed copies, and tried to give directions to his pupils.

Arthur rose, walked to the further end of the class-room, and stopped short before his master.

"Sir," said he, in a low but firm voice, "it was I who drew that caricature the other day. I am ashamed of it now. I dare not ask your forgiveness; but, at any rate, I do not wish you to suspect any of my companions."

A tremor passed through the class.

"That is well done!" said some of the boys. Others seemed altogether astonished at such an unexpected exhibition of courage and candour.

"An avowal like this makes amends for your fault," replied M. Kociuleszinska, as he embraced the boy. Arthur returned to his place without raising his eyes; but his cheeks glowed with generous emotions.

"And Arthur did that?" exclaimed Sara, when they told her of it. "Well done, well done, indeed! It must have cost him a great deal. I love him now with all my heart. I detested him before. What do you say, uncle, are you not pleased with him?"

"Yes; and I hope that this first act of true moral courage, is the sign of an awakening conscience, which may give an entirely different direction to his whole life. Nobly to acknowledge a fault is sometimes much more beautiful than never to commit one."

CHAPTER XXVII.

GOOD INFLUENCE.

Spring had given place to summer. Were it not for the passionate ardour with which the children pursued their studies, they would have bemoaned the sadness of the seasons, which had hitherto been distinguished by the varied pleasures which they brought in their train. Robert, who was not possessed, as were the others, with the spirit of labour, often sighed when he thought of the White House, the orchard and the stream, the refreshing murmur of which seemed, as his thoughts visited it, to be distinctly audible: he sometimes altogether forgot his lessons for several minutes in succession, so deeply had he plunged into the hay-cocks which must be now sweetly scenting the meadows. At the White House, too, the months were counted, then the weeks, then the days. M. Hervé had fixed to go to Paris at the beginning of August, that he might be present at the distribution of the prizes, and be ready to take charge of the young Lycéens, and of Sara who was invited to take her first look of the real country,—the wild uncultivated country. Her uncle threatened

indeed to come and bring her back in a very few days; for he said he could do nothing worth doing without her. The White House was to be a general rendezvous, for Madame Lambert had promised to be there on her brother's return with the young collegians, and to spend a portion of the vacation with them in the country.

But even in Paris summer has its pleasures. The heat was not felt to be oppressive in the old house of the Quartier-Latin; the great chestnut trees and high walls surrounding the garden nicely intercepted the rays of the sun, so that the shade which, was gloomy and disagreeable in winter, was now quite an advantage.

When Jérôme and Eugène got up, and putting their heads out of the window in the early morning, watched the purple line of light which preceded the rising of the sun in the horizon—when they heard the birds sing joyously amongst the leafy branches, and felt the fresh breezes of awakening day, they certainly felt no doubt whatever as to summer being preferable to the dismal winter, whose rigours they had so resolutely braved. It was now the last week in July; Jérôme's name was on the list of competitors in Latin prose, history, and Greek translation. Eugène's name stood only for history. He had been for some time past feeling very agitated and uncomfortable; it was so difficult to substitute, with entire good will, the desire to do right for that of securing, as he so easily might

have done, the applause of others. The very idea of being thrown into the shade by his cousin, to whose advancement he had certainly contributed in no small degree, occasioned him several violent struggles, the effects of which were felt from time to time by poor Jérôme. As to himself, he was much too deeply engrossed with his own idea, to dwell for a moment on Eugène's feelings at being obliged to take the second place; and he comprehended little or nothing of those freaks of temper and strange rebuffs of which he was the victim. Jérôme was no physiognomist—he was no reader of hearts—he never guessed what was not told him. As in science, so in friendship; it was necessary to explain everything.

On the evening preceding the important day, Eugène paced the garden walks alone. Some of the boys who had nothing to hope, as well as a few of the very youngest, were already gone. M. Hervé was expected shortly. Eugène was less anxious to see his papa than he could have believed possible. He walked backwards and forwards along the most retired paths, agitated by sad and troubled thoughts.

"If Jérôme had at least been grateful for the sacrifice I have made, or if I had renounced in his favour prizes which I myself merited, it would have been different; but now he has them, and I have the humiliation. It is true, he deserves them; no one else could have worked so indefatigably as he has done, but he would not be where he is, if I had not helped

him at the commencement, to set in order the chaos in which all his ideas were scattered. And all those hours I spent in explaining the rules about the participles, and the elements of geometry, could I not have employed them very usefully in my own affairs? And now, who thanks me for my pains? The professors are vexed with me, my companions have a poor opinion of me, and my parents will most likely be both grieved and disappointed! If it were to come over again, I would act differently."

"What are you about there, all alone, Eugène?" enquired Sara, who came suddenly upon him. "You are looking as black as a thunder-cloud!"

"I am thinking," replied Eugène, "and one's thoughts are not always merry ones. Here I am about to return home, with one prize; that is not very pleasant."

"Oh, that is all!" said Sara.

"You may think nothing of it, but I should have liked to give my mother pleasure."

"Pleasure! and won't she be pleased when she sees you well and happy, and when she reads in your eyes that you have done your duty?"

"But they may think I have been idle,—they may blame me!"

"Eugène, you think far too much of what people think about you. You have done your duty; you ought to leave the rest. Your father and mother will not be deceived, and as to anyone else, what does it matter?"

"You have always given me good advice, Sara," said the boy, after a moment's reflection. "Thank you! you are right. I do think too much of the opinion of others. I must learn to be contented with the approbation of my own conscience, and of God. But do you not think it will be very hard if my parents seem grieved?"

"Yes, certainly; and yet, even then, I think you ought to keep your secret."

"I think so, too; for I am sure if the desire to be praised for what I have done enters my mind, it will spoil everything. But shall I tell you what troubles me most, Sara? It is, that Jérôme never seems to have an idea that I have made any sacrifice for him. He never says a word about it, and when he sees me sad, he never tries to encourage me at all. I don't think it has ever entered his head, that the time I have devoted to him this winter might have been spent in my own studies. I am sure I do not know myself what I might otherwise have done. It is very certain, that it has not been altogether thrown away, for what I have explained to him is so thoroughly impressed upon my own mind, that I shall never forget it. We have almost gone over all the studies of the fifth division in preparing for our fourth. It will not be labour lost, but my lessons this year have been much less carefully prepared, than if I had had nothing else to do; and it is by that they judge us, and not by any hidden stores of learning that may have been acquired."

"But how has Jérôme managed to get before you?" asked Sara.

"When Jérôme once gets started, he studies most resolutely. Nothing is too difficult in the long run for his patient toil. But he would have floundered about amidst insurmountable difficulties, if no one had helped him; for his first ideas were not clear enough to enable him to make any solid progress. It was, therefore, necessary that he should go over all the groundwork again. Whatever he does know seems to be perpetually present to his mind. If he has thoroughly understood a rule, he never forgets to apply it."

"He is a happy fellow indeed," said Sara.

"And now, Sara, you know all," continued Eugène. "I am glad to think there is at least one person in the world who does not think worse of me than I deserve."

"Always the same, quite incorrigible!" exclaimed Sara, laughing. "All I can promise you is, that your secret shall be well kept. I do not promise even to remember it myself."

M. Hervé arrived a few hours after this conversation had taken place. He found his sons much developed in every way, and Jérôme greatly improved in appearance, inasmuch as he was taller and thinner. He announced his intention of setting off as soon as the distribution of prizes had taken place, and said that there was an almost equal degree of impatience felt, as to the result, by the inhabitants of the White

House as by the heroes themselves. Eugène blushed as he listened to his father's words; he stifled a sigh ready to betray his uneasiness, and relapsed into those mournful thoughts which had been suspended for a little moment by the pleasure of meeting.

M. Hervé scarcely had a moment with his children alone that day. He remained with M. Bertin in his study until a late hour, and only arrived from his hotel the next morning at the moment they had to start for the Lycée; but when he embraced the three boys, he seemed so happy, that it was almost as if he had said,—

"I am quite satisfied with you, my children. I have heard a very good account of all of you."

As they crossed the great court, Sara approached Eugène, and whispered,—

"Eugène, you might have been guilty of a crime, you look so miserable! I cannot understand you."

"It is easy enough to understand that I should rather take back some prizes to my mother than go to her empty-handed," replied Eugène, bitterly.

"Think of Jérôme: think what happiness it will be for you to be able to say, it is to you, in great measure, that he owes his success."

"Yes, indeed; and it never enters his head. It is fine pleasure, indeed, to sacrifice yourself for people who are all-unconscious of the fact."

"I want to tell you something, Eugène," said Sara, very seriously. "The sacrifices that we make for those we love are only of worth whilst they are

unsuspected. If we were rewarded by their gratitude, where would be the sacrifice? We should gain more than we should lose."

Eugène seemed to be struck with this idea; it had never occurred to him before.

"That is true! I understand it now. Oh, Sara, I wish you would always help me to struggle against my pride. My mother was right in saying it was my worst enemy. It is not difficult to do right when everybody approves of and praises you, but when no one does, it is very difficult."

"No one! And God, who knows everything," replied Sara. "If you knew how often I have been made miserable by people praising me for actions which proceeded from unworthy motives, and which must have been displeasing to God,—people who could not see my heart. Nothing is so humiliating as that."

"What gives me the most pain is that I am sure papa expects great things of me, and at home they are all fancying that I shall return laden with books and laurels. It will be a real sorrow for them. Clémence will be very angry with me, for she thinks a great deal of maintaining the honour of the family, and she quite reckoned upon me to uphold it at the Lycée. Oh, Sara, I wish Clémence was like you."

"I don't suppose she would feel much flattered by your wish," said the young lady, laughing. "Well, you are yourself again, Eugène, so I will leave you to go to your father, who seems very much astonished

at our long conversation. When Jérôme is called up, we will rejoice with him, will we not?"

"Yes," said Eugène, with all his heart, "but I shall be even more glad than you, because he is my cousin—almost like a brother to me, in fact."

"And more especially because you can say to yourself, that his success is in great measure owing to you."

So they separated; Eugène with renewed serenity, looking joyous and light-hearted; Sara happy in seeing him so.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF PRIZES.

It is certainly a very imposing ceremony, this distribution of prizes. The large hall or court, decorated with laurels, and lighted up to-day by the sun's brilliant rays. The grave and learned figures clustered on the platform, the splendid costumes, the speeches, the fashionably dressed crowd, animated, and becoming very excited by the delay —mothers and sisters anxiously wondering whether the names of their sons and brothers will be pronounced; bursts of music, blending continually with thunders of applause: all this made such a vivid impression upon Eugène, that he entirely forgot for the time being, the part he had to play in the ceremony. He had time to recover his consciousness, however, whilst the honours were adjudged to the first, second, and third classes. Then came the fourth.

"First prize for Latin prose, Lambert Jérôme," said the voice of the professor.

Jérôme mounted the platform as if in a dream,

held his head to be crowned, as he would have submitted to the knife of the executioner, received the customary salutation with the books, and descended, the crown still resting on his brow, appearing so embarrassed, and so thoroughly ashamed of his trophies that the people quite pitied him. On taking his place again by his cousin's side, he caught Eugene's whispered "Take your crown off again," and turned as red as fire at the idea of the ridiculous appearance his awkward timidity had occasioned him to make.

The next minute was announced, "First prize for Greek translation, Lambert Jérôme, *une fois courronné.*" He re-ascended the platform; and this time did not forget to remove his chaplet.

Eugène was so bewildered by all that passed around him, that it might have been entirely unexpected. Was he dreaming again, or was it a reality? When at length his own name was called, he scarcely heard it, and his companions were obliged to arouse his slumbering faculties with a nudge, before he had any idea of responding to the call; but he only once mounted the platform, and Jérôme had still three times to bear away the laurels. The cheering redoubled in intensity each time, and the military music seemed to associate itself with the general enthusiasm.

Jerôme himself seemed rather overcome than inebriated by his many honours.

When all was over, he whispered low to Eugène:

"If she had been here, do you think she would have been satisfied with me?"

"Oh yes!" answered his cousin, as he pressed his hand, "she will be both happy and proud too, and so will mamma; you know how dearly she loves you."

Eugène had really conquered himself! At this moment he had no other feeling than that of joy at his cousin's success. He was proud of him, and in the most disinterested way possible, for he even forgot that he had played a very important part in securing his triumph. As to Jérôme, he had no pride. One feeling absorbed all others,—it was a mixture of joy and apprehension,—for he had attained the end of his anxious efforts; he had realized the dreams of the year, but he did not know whether he should be loved; and it was for affection, not for honour, that his soul had thirsted.

M. Hervé warmly embraced and congratulated his nephew; he spoke no word of blame to Eugène, but the boy thought he looked surprised and pained at his very small measure of success. He envied Robert, from whom nothing had been expected, and who had, therefore, caused no feeling of disappointment.

"I had hoped better things of you, Eugène," said M. Bertin, as they returned to the house; "you could have succeeded if you had worked a little harder, for your cousin was much more backward than you at the beginning of the year, and you see how far he has left you behind him."

Eugène coloured, and his lip trembled. He was about to burst into tears, for he could hardly bear to be accused unjustly, even when he knew it to be altogether involuntary; but he met Sara's anxious eye fixed upon him, and his courage returned.

"I do assure you, sir, I have not been idle," replied he, gently.

"I do not reproach you, my boy, but you must remember another year, that the competition at the Lycée demands more earnest labour than you have expended upon it this time."

M. Hervé looked anxiously at Eugène. He could not understand what had wrought the change in one who had formerly been so ambitious, and so capable of persevering effort. The look of intelligence that he had noticed passing between the two children before the ceremony, made him think there must be some mystery, to which he had not the clue. So he resolved to wait patiently until it should either come out in the natural course of events, or until Eugène should himself give the explanation. Surely, ten months' separation, during which constant correspondence had been maintained, could not have sufficed to close the child's heart against so watchful and tender a parent!

The hour of departure arrived. All the preparations were concluded. A table was spread under the large chestnuts for their last repast, on the self-same spot where, ten months before, the new comers had received such dismal impressions, from a com-

parison between the withered grass, and leafless trees of the square and formal garden, enclosed within four high walls, and those beautiful scenes of natural loveliness they had so lately quitted. And now, they loved this poor garden, in which, during those ten months just ended, they had abandoned themselves to the somewhat boisterous delights of the recreation hour, or to sad memories of their father's house, when attacked, as they sometimes had been, by that worst of all maladies, home-sickness.

They loved it, and would have left in great sorrow, but for the almost certainty of a speedy return. What calls forth real attachment to a place, is not its beauty, but rather what we have *felt* whilst there; what we have learnt there of life.

There was, in fact, nothing to make the departure very heart-rending. Sara was of the party, and M. Hervé had contrived to obtain a promise that she should spend the entire two months of the vacation at the White House; her uncle was to come for her, and spend the last fortnight with them. No end of diplomacy had to be put in requisition, before such a sacrifice could be obtained. M. Hervé had spoken of Sara's pale cheeks, and of the great advantage she would be likely to derive from exchanging the studies she was pursuing too ardently, for the pleasures and amusements of an active country life, and for the pursuits more especially adapted to her sex and age, into which his young folks at home would soon initiate her. This was all so obviously true, that it

was impossible to deny it. Sara decidedly wished to go; she was promising herself great pleasure from this new phase of existence, and her uncle's love for her was not mere selfish love. So he had given his consent to the plan; yet, not without many expressions of regret, half of them serious—half in jest.

"Who is to find me the volume and page I want now?" said he. "Who will find my spectacles, when I have mislaid them?"

Sara began to laugh at this.

"Don't you remember, uncle, that when you thought you had mislaid them, it was ten to one that they were upon your nose?"

"That is a calumny. They were not there one-half the times! But who is to arrange all my papers? For I would rather throw them into the fire at once, than let Madame Germain touch them. If she once set them in order, there would be small hope of finding anything again. But, above all, who will make my study ring again with merry peals of laughter, and fill it with sunshine, even on wet days?"

"And who will interrupt you a hundred times, when you are busy reading? And who will make you keep awake so unmercifully, when you would fain have a nap, instead of talking to her in the evening? And what wicked little personage will hide your open book under the large dictionary, where you never think of seeking for it, if she fancies she would rather take a lesson from her old professor than let him

study on his own account, which she knows all the while, he would fain be doing? Ah, my dear uncle, you must confess that you are about to gain quite as much as you lose."

"It is very possible! I will try to take that view of the case, and, at any rate, I hope not to become a complete hermit ere the day arrives for me to join you at St. Réal. It is an evil which certainly menaces us old sages," added the Professor, addressing himself to M. Hervé, who had just joined the party. "We are in danger of forgetting, in our search after the lore of the ancients, that life, always young, is circulating as abundantly to-day as in the past. It is certain that the past ought not to triumph over the claims of the present and the future. It is a good thing to be surrounded with young people. They warm the heart and re-kindle the imagination. If grown persons are necessary to children, I believe that children are even more necessary to old gentlemen like me, who would otherwise forget how to live."

Most of their companions were already gone. Those who remained joined them at the table, under the still green branches of the chestnuts. Everyone had permission to talk that day, so that the repast was both animated and joyful. The perspective of those nine vacation-weeks, that most delightful period of the whole year, not yet commenced, but separated from them now by no frightful obstacle, this enchanting perspective set free the tongues even of the timid and morose.

Jérôme's health was drunk, he being the hero of the little feast, and he bore the trial with better grace and less embarrassment than they could have supposed possible. He blushed a good deal, it is true, but held his glass to those who claimed the honour of touching it with theirs, returned thanks without any redundancy of expression, and what created the most astonishment, was able to swallow down his wine without choking.

Towards the close of dinner, M. Bertin spoke of Jean Paul. After adverting to the marvellous facility he possessed for the study of languages; he recounted the sacrifice that he had made with such entire simplicity and unselfishness, and the courage with which he had entered upon and now pursued his scarcely palatable duties. M. Hervé listened to the recital with great interest. He had heard of M. Hermann's decease, and of his son's return, but was unacquainted with any of the circumstances of the case.

"And what sort of prospects do you suppose the young man has now?" asked M. Hervé, when he had expressed his admiration of the lad's noble conduct.

"None at all! I see nothing before him but the constant repetition of the daily round of duties in this fatiguing and badly-remunerated calling. His university education is so incomplete, that he cannot take any position, notwithstanding his acquirements; and really in his present station, these are more of an incumbrance than anything else, instead of being

a treasure whence he might draw continually fresh stores for the world's benefit. I am certain he now expends a great deal of labour in the preparation of the most simple of his lessons."

"It is mournful, indeed, to think that he who might have had such a brilliant career, will now do nothing of any account," said M. Prosper.

"And is it nothing to have nobly done his duty! Is he not rather to be envied than pitied?" exclaimed Sara, drawn on by an irresistible enthusiasm.

"True!" replied M. Bertin. "We are wrong to speak of wasted talents, and a useless life. In the sight of God, his career will be more noble than the most brilliant or the most useful could ever be in the eyes of men. I believe that hidden actions of self-sacrifice, similar to that of Jean Paul, are much more frequent than we have any idea of, and that when God looks down from Heaven upon our world, He sees a whole army of these unknown labourers, who, having renounced the honour and the glory which come from men only, are bravely toiling in their own humble furrow, seeking their strength solely in the knowledge of His approbation, and in the satisfaction resulting from accomplished duty. They are not themselves aware that they have performed anything meritorious; men despise and reject them, but He who knows them, and has watched the struggle and the sacrifice, does not leave them unrequited in the secret of their own hearts. It should never be forgotten, that warmth of heart is infinitely

superior to quickness of intellect, and that he who loves others, whilst he forgets himself, is the greatest before God!"

Sara looked at Eugène in triumph. He blushed as he remembered the many egotistical regrets which had been silenced with so much difficulty. What was his sacrifice compared with Jean Paul's; and yet he had not been able to make it joyfully. He was ashamed of himself.

It was a beautiful summer evening. The day had been intensely hot, and now the cool breeze was felt to be most refreshing. The stars had come out one by one upon the clear blue sky. All were silent; each one occupied with quiet serious thoughts. So this last day of school-life was concluded as it might have been in the most intimate family circle, and when at length M. Hervé gave the signal of departure, and they bade each other adieu, they all rejoiced in being able to add, *Au revoir!*

CHAPTER XXIX.

EXPECTATION.

Whilst the travellers were rapidly approaching St. Réal, the inhabitants of the White House were counting the minutes of the few remaining hours of separation. Madame Hervé, whose pale cheeks were now glowing with anticipation, which also imparted to her eyes an unwonted lustre, had planted herself on the terrace, whence might be seen the hilly road stretching away into the distance. Partly reclining in a large easy chair, by her side, was a pale, thin lady, who would scarcely have been recognized as the lively and brilliant Madame Lambert. She was recovering from a serious illness, which had brought her to the very verge of the grave; and she had by no means regained her strength. The conversation of the ladies was interrupted by long pauses, during which some fragments of one carried on between Clémence and Isabelle, as they sat on the grass in the orchard, fell occasionally upon the ear. They were weaving garlands of flowers and evergreens, to suspend over the hall door and within the vestibule.

"When do you think they can be here?" asked Isabelle.

"At seven o'clock, I think; certainly not before.

"We must make haste, Clémence. I want to have everything pretty to receive them. The tops of our old trees will be gilded with the rays of the sun, and the house will be half in light, half in shadow. With these garlands of flowers, it will be just like fairy-land. Do you think they will be pleased?"

"No doubt they will. I wish it had never come into papa's head to invite Sara; it spoils all our pleasure."

"Oh, I should have been so sorry if he had not asked her. I quite long to make her acquaintance. Eugène seems to have been very fond of her for some time past. Mamma said the other day she thought Sara had done him a great deal of good; and, from the way in which she spoke, I think she must be a good-hearted generous girl. I hope she will not think me too little for her to notice. Don't you think, Clémence, she will find us very ignorant; she is so clever herself?"

"It is just that which makes me afraid of knowing her," replied Clémence. "I don't think a girl has any business with Greek and Latin; she is sure to be either insufferably pedantic or just like a boy. I will be polite towards her, because we ought to be polite to all our guests, but I know I shall not like her."

"Well, it does not much matter to me what she is; I am going to see Eugène and Robert again! my Robert! and poor Jérôme, too. I like him, don't you, Clémence?"

"Yes, certainly," replied her sister. "I am afraid he has been sadly vexed, poor fellow. He seems to have worked very hard, but no doubt Eugène has run away with all the prizes. I am sorry for him."

"And so am I! It must be so disappointing to have taken so much trouble for nothing."

"Take care, Isabelle! You are putting too much heather in that garland; there will not be enough left for the others."

"There is plenty upon the hills; there is no need to be careful about a little heather."

"Yes; but we shall not have time to go and fetch it; everything must be ready before we go up to dress, and I have to arrange the table."

"Not time! Oh how delightful to think we shall not have time. Now I begin to believe they are really coming. See, Nicolas is going down the hill with the carriage. How happy he is too! You may know by the way in which he smacks his whip. Clémence, suppose we put some flowers on the table. Don't you think it is a good idea?"

"Yes, garden flowers. You may gather them if you like whilst I finish the wreaths, but be careful not to gather too many of those before the house—choose a flower here and there—those that are not much seen and not quite fully blown; a little green will be wanted too. If you bring them all to me, I will arrange the bouquets. Be sure not to gather too many red and yellow flowers, only just a few to relieve the softer colours."

Isabelle set off on her mission, singing and jumping for very joy.

The ladies had been talking, too, upon the terrace above of the expected arrivals.

Madame Lambert remarked—

"You may be right, sister, and this poor Jérôme" —why in the world did everyone persist in tacking *poor* on to the lad's name!—"may have more heart than I have given him credit for; and yet his letters this winter have strengthened my impression. You would scarcely believe, that when his papa wrote to inform him of my serious illness, he made but little remark that evinced his feeling."

"He is timid, and afraid of exposing the treasured feelings of his heart," replied Madame Hervé. "Natures of this kind need drawing out, and encouraging; the very circumstance of their being believed in, inspires them with confidence in themselves. If you will permit me to give you a hint, my dear sister, I would beseech you to try this method; you will find that your. impressions of Jérôme will soon be materially influenced."

"He is of an age at which the heart's best affections usually develop themselves," pursued Madame Lambert, who shrunk from avowing, even to herself, that this development might have taken place much earlier had she encouraged it; "but, as regards his intellect, he will always be dull and heavy. The poor boy will never be able to accomplish what to others is mere play-work, without great effort; and

as he unfortunately is not fond of trouble, we can only hope he may get through his studies respectably. His master has given him a very good character all the year. No doubt he has done his best, and we ought not to expect more than that, so I am determined never to reproach him. As to you, sister, your pride will be fully satisfied, your Eugène will bring you a whole harvest of laurels."

"God grant that he may not bring me more pride, than merit," thought Madame Hervé, who felt no doubt, either, that Eugène had terminated the year most brilliantly.

The day seemed longer to the two mothers, who waited, and could not wile away the hour in work, than it did to the young ladies who, with all their activity, could barely manage to complete their preparations.

When the sun began to dart his rays obliquely from the verge of the horizon, Clémence was climbing up a ladder to suspend the garlands in graceful festoons over the entrance. The hall was adorned already, and the drawing room full of flowers according to custom. The dining-room table, which was covered with a clean white cloth, was ornamented by two magnificent bouquets carefully arranged by Clémence. There were, too, some large cakes, such as Robert and Eugène had never seen since they left the White House. Everything wore a holiday aspect, ravishing to the eyes; even inanimate objects seemed to be associated with the joy of every heart.

Clémence, extremely well-satisfied with her handiwork, then went up with Isabelle to dress. She wished to preside over her sister's toilette, and put the poor girl's patience—for she had but small possessions in that line—to cruel proof.

"Clémence, oh Clémence, won't you soon have done? Don't you see the sun is going to set? They will be here before I have my frock on! Well, I don't mind. You can't prevent my running to welcome them. What does it matter if one curl does hang lower than the other! There they are! I hear a carriage. Oh, Clémence, you torture me!"

And Isabelle, tearing away from her sister, ran to the window! It was no carriage at all—only a heavy waggon belonging to the farm. She returned, therefore, to her imperturbable sister, who said quietly—

"If you go on so, you will certainly succeed in not being ready."

Diana seemed also to participate in the state of general expectancy; perhaps she was aware that the people of the house were not conducting themselves in their usual manner. At any rate, instead of remaining quietly in the corner, darting upon the poor flies as they came in her way, watching the passing clouds, or shutting her eyes upon all things visible, she rushed backwards and forwards, sometimes appearing in quest of something that could not be found, then again uttering a short quick bark, by way of question to those around, who, alas! not being acquainted with her language, were unable to utter one

word that might be effectual in calming the agitations to which her mind was evidently a prey.

The two little girls having made their toilet, reappeared in clean muslin frocks.

Clémence, with her smooth glossy hair and the beautiful white hands of which Eugène had spoken to Sara, whilst Isabelle's sunny beaming face was surrounded with a halo of clustering golden curls. The child ran up to Diana, who placed one paw on each of her shoulders, according to her favorite custom.

"Down, Diana, down!" exclaimed Clémence, who was indignant at such an ill-timed exhibition of tenderness. "How can you let the creature make your frock so untidy, Isabelle?"

"I never refuse caresses," replied the little girl, as she took Diana's beautiful head between her hands, and pressed it against her. "But what can be the matter? She is all in a tremble, from head to foot: she expects them evidently. Oh, Diana, if you could but speak, how much you would have to tell us; you love them dearly, too, don't you?"

The next moment, and Diana tore herself impulsively from the embrace of her young mistress, and rushed like an arrow towards the door leading into the court, whence she gained the road. A few seconds and she was out of sight.

"She must have scented them in the distance," said Clémence. "I am sure they are coming!"

"They are here, they are here!" cried Isabelle,

opening the drawing-room door, her mamma and aunt having left the terrace at sunset.

When Madame Hervé reached the door, the carriage was already in the court, and two great boys sprang out into their mother's arms even before it stopped. For a moment there was a scene of strange confusion: kisses, laughter, tears, exclamations, caresses, many of which were lavished upon Diana who seemed wild with joy; words all unconnected, questions which nobody waited to have answered, answers which did not in the least refer to the questions proposed. Jérôme, who had stood a little in the back ground, now came forward to embrace his aunt. He looked round for some one he had evidently expected to see, and seemed more moved than joyful.

"Your mother is in the drawing-room, my dear boy," said his aunt; "she is too weak still to be able to stand about, but is all impatience to embrace you."

She tried to push him towards the drawing-room door; but he hung back as if afraid to enter, and took refuge behind his aunt whilst she cordially welcomed Sara, whose turn was now come. Clémence shook hands with her in a way that formed a decided contrast to her mother's warm-hearted kiss.

CHAPTER XXX.

ALL FOR THE BEST.

JÉRÔME went up to his mother timidly, and when she opened her arms, he did not dare to rush into them as he had so often panted to be allowed to do. So he kissed her rather coldly, and rather repressed the show of affection she was prepared to make; he then left the room, according to an ancient custom of his, as if his place was anywhere but in the family circle. The other children grouped themselves round the two mothers, and in the midst of anecdotes of school-life, caresses, and bursts of joy, no one noticed Jérôme's absence, particularly as he did not very often take a prominent part in conversation. M. Hervé now entered; he had staid behind to give some necessary orders. Approaching his sister, whom he had not yet seen since his return, he said:—

"I bring you back a laureate. Your boy returns laden with crowns and college-honours. He has had four prizes, and has borne the trial with a modesty, which could scarcely be surpassed."

"You are speaking of Eugène, I suppose," replied

Madame Lambert. "I quite expected it. I had foretold it all to his mamma. Come here, my dear, and let me congratulate you on your brilliant success."

"But I was not speaking of Eugène," replied M. Hervé; "even had he merited it, I should certainly not have spoken of him thus in his presence. It is Jérôme who is the hero of the day. Has no one told you, then, that he was the first boy of his class?"

"Jérôme!" exclaimed Madame Lambert in great astonishment; "can it be possible?"

"It is, indeed; and his success has been gained by studies, which could only have been mastered by such dogged perseverance and strength of will, that his masters all agree in saying they have reflected equal honour on his character and on his abilities. He has really played the part of a little hero! struggling with energy against every disadvantage, gaining ground day by day, and not allowing any difficulty to discourage him. M. Bertin says he has never before seen a boy make such surprising and continued progress in one year. There have been boys who made desperate efforts, it is true; but they often lost as much ground by negligence, after an achievement, as they had gained by study ill-sustained.

"Jérôme is the very first whom he has seen advance, — first slowly, but surely, — then faster and faster, passing from the last place to the first, through

all the intermediate stages. The boy has given us a specimen, during this year, of what he can do; and an earnest of what he may become."

Madame Lambert could not overcome her astonishment.

"But is it really of Jérôme you are speaking,—of the child of whom I expected nothing?"

"I expected great things of him, and yet not so much as this," said the sweet voice of Madame Hervé. "He is very young to give proof of such strength of character. Why is he not here, dear fellow, that we may embrace him, and tell him of all the joy he has given us?"

"He never is present when it is a question of praise," said Robert laughing; "but, on the contrary, he has more than once been at hand very conveniently, to receive reproofs and punishments that others have deserved."

"I see he is still the same unfortunate fellow he ever was," said his mother, smiling. "But what can have inspired Jérôme, who used to be so idle, with this intense love of study? I cannot understand it. It seems perfectly inexplicable."

"Oh, aunt," cried Eugène, "it is all for you that he has done it!"

"For me! What do you mean?"

Eugène stopped and blushed painfully. He was obliged to explain himself, however, and stammered out in considerable trepidation:—

"He wished—he had such a great desire—he did it all that you might love him, aunt!"

A profound silence followed these words. Eugène had spoken them involuntarily, and without reflection, and was afraid he had done wrong. Madame Lambert seemed both affected and embarrassed, but soon recovered herself, and added:—

"And you, Eugène!—surely you have some prizes, too, my boy. Jérôme's unexpected triumphs must not make us overlook yours."

Eugène hung down his head, and replied almost inaudibly, that he had scarcely gained anything.

"Eugène has only one prize," said M. Hervé; "nothing very brilliant."

"Oh, Eugène!" exclaimed Clémence reproachfully.

"And we thought he would have won them all," cried little Isabelle. "I am very glad that Jérôme has some; and yet all my pleasure is spoiled. I wish they had both been equal."

"That was impossible, Isabelle," said Clémence, "because they were in the same class."

"I know that," replied the child; "but it does not prevent my wishing it."

Madame Hervé looked tenderly, but rather sadly, on her boy.

"He will do better another year," said she, passing her arm around him; "he knows now, from his cousin's example, that if anyone wants to succeed he must work. We won't be discouraged. I am sure this year has not been a lost one."

"Mamma," whispered Eugène, with a look so

frank and open, that it was impossible to doubt the perfect veracity of his words, "I do assure you I have worked well; and it is not my fault that I have not succeeded better."

"Very well, my child, I believe you; and this assurance enables me to rejoice unhesitatingly in Jérôme's victory, for he is also a little bit my boy! But where can he be? It is strange that he should have disappeared at the moment he must have known we were wanting to embrace him."

"I will go and fetch him," said Isabelle. "I can find him well enough, even if he is hiding in the attic or in the cellar."

"Tell him we are going to sit down to table. Travellers are hungry people; we must not wait any longer."

"What flowers! what cakes!" exclaimed M. Hervé, as he seated himself at the table so carefully decorated by Clémence and Isabelle. "This is indeed a feast! What is your opinion, Miss Sara? My little girls know how to make use of the garden, do they not? All that you see before you is grown by us or made in the house, the flowers, the sweet honey, the beautiful fruit, the butter, cream, and cakes. I shall have pleasure in showing you over the fields and village to-morrow, as you are so very fond of the country." "You can scarcely imagine," he continued, addressing the ladies, "what ecstasies this little Parisienne went into during the journey. A flock of sheep scattered over the meadow, a cluster of

trees, a hill, a flower by the road-side—everything delighted her. I am curious to know how she will bear the strong emotions which the view of our woods and mountains will occasion her."

"You must not say too much of them beforehand, or she may be disappointed," observed Madame Hervé.

"Oh no, never!" cried Sara, "do I not already know this country is a little paradise? Oh, Eugène, I have no longer any wish to close my eyes and look within. However can any one have the courage to go and shut themselves up in the city, when they live in such a delicious corner of the world?"

Robert and Eugène clapped their hands with glee.

"That's something like talking," said they. "Sara, you are worthy to be a guest at St. Réal!"

At this moment the door opened, and Isabelle appeared, holding Jérôme's hand. He was quite red and out of breath, she had made him run so fast.

"I was sure I could find him," she cried; "but I had some trouble to do it. Guess where he was? Why, in his old room, quite alone; his head was buried on the pillow as if he felt ashamed of himself, instead of being proud of carrying off so many prizes. But, however, here he is—he did not want to come, although I told him the table was covered with cakes."

Madame Lambert had risen; she went hastily to Jérôme and folded him to her heart.

"Your papa will be so pleased," said she. Jérôme raised his eyes as if this were not just what he expected. He seemed to say, "And you, mamma?"

She clasped him again fondly, and, answering the look, added, "and I am very happy."

Jérôme blushed, then turned pale, but dared not reply. His aunt and cousins pressed around to congratulate him.

"Dear boy, your success has given me as much pleasure as if you were my own son," said Madame Hervé. "God has blessed your effort; may He now graciously bless your joy, and mingle it with humility and thankfulness."

"Ah, but you must not only congratulate me, aunt," said Jérôme, trying to control his voice which trembled with emotion. "You must congratulate Eugène too. If it had not been for him, I should have been still at the bottom of the class. It was he who helped me, encouraged me, and sacrificed his hours of study to me; if it had not been for that, he would certainly have won every prize."

M. and Madame Hervé exchanged glances. This, then, was the cause of Eugène's failure; and he had kept his secret! He had endured the pain of being misunderstood, perhaps even of being unjustly blamed, rather than diminish in any way the lustre of his cousin's triumph! To those who knew him intimately, it seemed a most heroic sacrifice.

His parents' hearts were filled with far purer joy than they would have been, had all the crowns of the world been heaped upon their child.

Sara was perfectly happy, for her friends were so. Eugène had acted nobly, and Jérôme had followed in his track; both had proved themselves worthy of the friendship she entertained for them, and her heart beat right joyously, and her eyes glistened like the very stars for brightness: her countenance at that moment was lighted up by the generous feelings that animated her.

It was a happy evening for the group that filled the drawing-room at the White House.

The fatigues of the day did not permit of its being greatly prolonged, however; although there were a few dissentient voices, when the question of separation was mooted.

"But we are so comfortable here; and there will be no unmerciful bell to force us from our beds in the morning. Mamma, please do not send us off so very early the first day!"

But Madame Hervé remarked, that the first day was not the last—that they hoped to meet again and continue their interrupted conversation; and that they might, in the meantime, prolong the pleasures of the day by weaving them into the peaceful dreams of the night.

This last consideration silenced all complaint. M. Hervé opened the family Bible and read a psalm; then knelt down and thanked God from a full heart,

that He had so mercifully preserved them all during their first year of separation, and loaded them with blessings. Thanksgivings, even more ardent than those to which he gave expression, arose from his heart to Him who had not only restored his children to their home, but had permitted them to return such as he most desired to see them, equally sincere, simple, and affectionate, yet stronger in spirit and more capable of self-renunciation and sacrifice, than when they left him.

Whilst Clémence and Isabelle went to introduce Sara to her room, the boys descended to the kitchen to renew acquaintance with the cat, the cook, and in fact, with the whole of that portion of the dwelling, every corner of which had its place in their memory. Nicolas was seated in a corner, apparently pleased to enjoy his well-earned repose.

"Well, Nicolas, my good friend, and do you remember us, or are we as frightfully changed for the worse as you seemed to expect when we started for Paris?"

"Upon my word, I am not very famous for paying compliments, as you know, Master Robert; but I may confess that I feel quite myself to-day. This house has seemed deserted these last ten months. It is only to-day I seem to know myself."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Nicolas. I was afraid you would be only too glad not to have anybody to torment you, to lose your tools, and trample over the flower borders. Now tell me honestly, was

it not more pleasant, in these respects, to know that I was safe, two or three hundred miles away?"

"Well, you may believe it or not, as you like; but I quite missed having anybody to find fault with. I was used to you, and it came quite natural to have to repair the mischief you had done; and poor Miss Isabelle was so dull too, poor little lady! Ah sir, I wish you would believe me, when I tell you there is not a happier spot on earth than this; and as God has given you a good nest here, why should you go about seeking another?"

"I am as thoroughly convinced as you can be, that there is no place in the world like St. Réal—that the White House is the most charming and delightful of all dwelling-places, and that I love the persons who live in it better than any others upon earth; and yet—I must go away, notwithstanding."

"Yes, because your papa wishes it. We must suppose he knows what is really best for you; and it is not for me to judge. But still, if I had a voice in the matter, I should say, 'Why go so far to seek what can be found at home?' Life is too short to allow of our spending its best years apart. Would not children learn more if surrounded by the works of the good God, than from the books and fancies of the learned, who cannot even explain how a blade of grass rises from the earth?"

"Good night, Nicolas," said Robert, laughing. "I have no time now to take up the cudgels in defence

of these poor literati. I must go to bed; we will continue the discussion to-morrow."

"The brave Nicolas is just the same," he exclaimed, whilst he ran up stairs with his brother; "he talks just as he did last year; his conversation does not vary much, but it is very pleasant to look upon his kind old face again."

When Jérôme was in bed that evening, the door of his room opened, and Madame Lambert approached with a light step, whilst she shaded the light with her hand, in order that it should not arouse him. She placed it behind the shadow of the curtain, seated herself near the bed, and watched him long. It was easy to see by her expression, that she was absorbed by sweet, yet sad and serious thoughts.

"Poor child!" she thought, "he has suffered, and has not found in me the tenderness that I ought to have shown him, and that he richly deserved. I have not been able to understand his character—it is my duty to develop and enrich his heart. I have not done it, and yet it would have been a most noble task. May God pardon me that I have failed to accomplish it! It is a sad, yet a sweet thought, that whilst I treated him with so much severity, he loved me so tenderly; and that this affection has been the occasion of all his efforts and of his astonishing progress. Yes, but it was not I who directed him and strengthened him in his heroic struggle. I have only done him harm; his help has come from others. It seemed to me most difficult to love him.

I thought his nature would not repay culture. How little I knew him! Ah, in future he shall have a mother, a true mother! We will begin, as it were, a new life, and a new relationship. I hope it may be possible to gain his confidence, as I already possess his affection. At any rate, no effort shall be wanting on my part to secure it."

She arose, bent over him, and gently pressing her lips upon his brow, whispered, "My poor child, may God bless thee!"

This kiss, and the kind words by which it was accompanied, awoke Jérôme; he dimly saw a figure bending over him. Was it his aunt? Was it—? He dared not hope—he dared not believe that the happiness he had so often dreamed of had become a reality. And yet it was not his aunt—it was that mother so ardently yet so secretly loved, who was really now bending over him with an expression of tenderness on her pale sweet face, such as he had never yet seen there.

He threw both arms around her neck, and whispered—

"Oh, mamma, you do love me, then!"

What happy dreams he had that night, and what exquisite joy, when, on awakening in the morning, he clearly recalled to his mind the incidents of the evening. He was so light-hearted, that he scarcely recognised himself; and a change seemed likewise to have passed around him. He could have doubted whether he had ever seen the blue sky, or heard the

sweet song of the birds at day-break—so much more blue did the heavens now appear, so much more harmonious the notes of the feathered warblers. Could he really be the same Jérôme who had arrived at the White House less than a year ago, morose, discouraged, and distrustful of himself? Certainly, the past year had been to him especially a most eventful and happy one. His uncle, Eugène, and Sara presented themselves, by turn, to his mind as especial objects of his gratitude. Each of them had held out the helping hand, had raised him in his own opinion, had helped him to triumph over his idleness, and to vanquish difficulties which had appeared insurmountable. He said nothing, for happiness had not rendered him suddenly expansive; but, in his heart, he was not ungrateful.

A crowd of radiant faces assembled round the breakfast table. It is really delicious on the first day of vacation-time, to feel that many such days will follow in its train, one is not in a hurry to exhaust its joys, — there is time enough before you; they must be enjoyed one by one. To do nothing, to have no fixed duty, to let the hours run on without counting them, is a pleasure of itself sufficiently great.

Subjects of the most intense interest are not at once entered upon with those just reunited, conversation is left to flow easily, divers topics are dipped into; it is happiness enough to listen to the voices we love, to recognise familiar gestures, to feel ourselves near each other.

In this manner the first day was passed. Many projects were made, and none executed, and when evening arrived, although everyone made a resolution to pass the next day more profitably, none regretted that this had been so spent.

Clémence and Sara, in spite of all fears to the contrary, got on very well together, and appeared to like each other. Isabelle had found her Robert, and hung about him like his very shadow. Eugène and Jérôme were inseparable, too: so that they had each their own individual happiness to unite with the common stock.

We are about to take leave of these happy inmates of the White House. Well, is it not pleasant to know that they are happy? And may we not hope that we leave them better than we found them?

CHAPTER XXXI.

AND AFTERWARDS?

And afterwards? Such is always the exclamation with which children greet the conclusion of a narrative, whether it be longer or shorter, mournful or gay, amusing or serious, — at least if it has inspired them with the slightest degree of interest.

And afterwards? Perhaps our young readers uttered this question when they reached the end of the preceding chapter. They may not be satisfied to leave our young friends happy; but are longing to know whether their happiness was continuous, if the harmony reigning amongst them remained undisturbed, whether the vacation realized all their sunny expectations; and whether, on returning to Paris, school-life did not appear a little more rugged after their recent experience of the joys of home. Possibly curiosity may even lead still further, and they may enquire what has become of their young friends, what future is opening before them, and whether the promise of their childhood has been realized in maturer age.

It would be difficult to reply satisfactorily to these

varied inquiries. The year of which we have related the annals is scarcely closed, and the future is folded as a mysterious scroll, into which neither they nor ourselves can penetrate.

Let us try, however, if we can lift but a little corner of the veil which covers it, not to obtain an answer to the questions, "What will they do?" or "What will happen to them?"—those are God's secrets; but to this, "What will they become?"

"What will they become?" If it is true that the child is father of the man, this question will not be left entirely unanswered. Oh how much more importance would children attach to the years of youth and study, if they could but be persuaded that they enclose the seed that will bear fruit in their future life: with how much more serious effort would they wage war against evil, could they but be convinced of the fact that every victory, and every defeat, will bear a lasting influence upon their life! Study would appear more useful, labour more precious, could they remember, that, by study and labour, they must acquire the intellectual and moral strength which will be needed alike in the search after, and in the practice of virtue. But these are facts which are only fully understood later in life, when the happy years are gone never to return, and when the memory is too often charged with bitter consciousness of their utter waste!

Happy, then, a thousand times more happy are those children, who, under the guidance of a firm

and tender hand, are accustomed to labour, to effort, and to self-renunciation, before they can comprehend their value!

"What will they become?" Those who love them often ask themselves this question. Will they go through life without object, and without any high ambition, only dreaming of present enjoyment, utterly forgetful of the fact, that the time which is given us to pass upon this earth is meant for high and holy purposes, and the accomplishment of great duties, that we may conquer ourselves, and serve our neighbour and our God? Will Robert always remain careless, instinctively good and loyal, but incapable of sustained effort? Will the thirst for approbation continue to be the motive of Eugène's every action? Will Jérôme always have to do fierce battle against his old enemies, idleness and discouragement, although for a little moment he surmounted them by the strength of an affection that was stronger than they?

Each of us has an enemy in his bosom, akin to his very nature: it is of most essential consequence to be convinced of this, and to declare war against him to the death. He will not be vanquished by one blow; but his strength will be weakened by every struggle, and eventually from having been the master, he will become the slave.

Eugène will have to watch against his pride all his life long, and Jérôme against the propensity to self-indulgence.

But the battle has commenced; they have already known something of the blessedness of accomplished duty, and self-sacrifice; and of both it can be said with confidence,—

Enfant tu t'es vaincu, tu seras homme un jour.

And the others? Jean Paul will follow his humble calling; he will always love science, but he will love duty better, and will only reserve for the first that to which the second makes no claim. His life will not be a happy one, if this word is understood to signify a brilliant career in which his faculties would be fully appreciated and developed; but it will be,—if, on the other hand, the word be taken in its more extended sense, his inheritance will be the peace of a good conscience, and the joy of knowing, that his act of self-sacrifice has been smiled upon by his Heavenly Father. Arthur will, no doubt, learn that to be his own aim and centre is not the surest way of securing happiness; but that a man, or even a child, is valued according to what he is, not according to what he has: and that a life, which is useless to others, is miserably wasted, however brilliant it may appear to a superficial observer. He, too, has gained one victory; let us hope it is the earnest of frequently recurring strife, and of repeated triumphs, which will end in the transformation of this vain and selfish child into a man. It is a more slow and difficult process than he supposed it to be on the day when we first met him; but, perhaps, he begins to comprehend that life has a noble object,

and that it is clothed with peculiar beauty for those who regard it seriously. We may reasonably hope that Sara and Clémence have exchanged some of their precious and estimable qualities during the time passed together. Sara may have communicated something of her ardour, her generosity and love of literature, and have received some of the more feminine gifts of her companion, — such as order, quietness, method, general capability, and, to specify a little more particularly, the envied talent of shirt-making. Knowledge of the Greek language will not be found an insuperable obstacle to the study of needlework, the two things are not absolutely incompatible.

Happy will it be for Sara, if, on taking leave of the White House, she can not only read Homer, but braid her glossy hair, and make clothing for the poor. And why not? True superiority may adorn any sphere, and Sara is too intelligent and noble to be satisfied to be but half a woman.

And afterwards? is there not another life in which account must be rendered of the manner in which this one has been spent? Can their own strength suffice for their conduct through that narrow pathway which leads above? No; they are well aware that their strength is but weakness, that evil is rooted in their very soul, and that there must be another life, — a life superior to their own infused into it, to change and purify it. No labour, no effort, no victory gained over self

will suffice them. It is a great thing to resolve, it is a greater thing to act; but where are strength and perseverance in what is good to be found in this world, where evil has so much power and attractiveness, if it be not in Him who lived a life of holiness and love, and died a cruel death, in order that we might be partakers of His holiness to all eternity? Even a child may be a sharer of this divine life. God does not disdain to dwell in the youngest heart, and even men must go to him, with childlike humility and trust, before He is willing to make their hearts His habitation.

May every child, who reads this little book, understand that it is only by humility and prayer that he can conquer himself. Let him not be discouraged if his early efforts sometimes seem vain; but let him turn towards his Saviour, who loves and is waiting to bless him. In Him is the strength and the life, as in Him is also the truth. Without His aid, it is but little we can do; with it nothing is impossible! And to those who, with a sincere heart, seek His grace and assistance, we may say, without fear of mistake as to Eugène and Jérôme,—

Enfant tu t'es vaincu, tu seras homme un jour!

THE END.

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